Patient Satisfaction in a Transference-Focused Psychotherapy Group (TFP-G) for Eating Disorders and Personality Disorders

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Group Transference-Focused Psychotherapy (TFP-G) is an emerging therapeutic model for personality disorders. Given the limited evidence on TFP-G, assessing feasibility and patient satisfaction is an important first step to determine its acceptability and perceived clinical usefulness. This study explores these aspects in an open, outpatient TFP-G group with variable composition, conducted over one year with patients in remission from ED and a comorbid personality disorder.

Methods

Participants

Eight female participants aged 18–57 years (M = 30.00, SD = 12.60) took part in the study. Diagnoses included binge eating disorder (n = 3), anorexia nervosa (n = 2), and unspecified eating disorder (n = 3). All participants presented a borderline personality organization and were receiving outpatient treatment at a private mental health center. The mean duration of their ongoing treatment was 22.13 months (SD = 16.43; range: 6–48).

Analyses

Means and standard deviations were calculated for the quantitative items. Qualitative responses were analyzed descriptively by identifying the most recurrent themes and selecting representative excerpts from participants' written answers.

Procedure & Measures

Data were collected from a semi-open TFP-G group that had been running for one year in a specialized ED outpatient setting. The group met weekly for 75 minutes and was co-led by two therapists, who alternated between leading and observing roles, under ongoing supervision from a TFP-G expert. Participants completed an ad hoc satisfaction questionnaire that included 13 quantitative items assessing satisfaction and perceived usefulness —11 rated on a 1–5 scale and 2 on a 0–10 scale— and 7 qualitative items addressing helpful and less helpful aspects, difficult experiences, relevant interventions, perceived learning and changes, and suggestions for improvement.

Results

Quantitative analysis

Item	M	SD	Range
I have felt welcomed and respected within the group.	4.71	0.49	4-5
The group has helped me gain a better understanding of my emotions.	4.28	0.76	3-5
The group has helped me better understand my relationships with others.	4.43	0.79	3-5
The therapists' interventions have been helpful to me.	4.00	0.58	3-5
The contributions of other group members have been important to my process.	4.43	0.53	4-5
The group has helped me identify recurring patterns in my relationships.	4.57	0.53	4-5
The group has helped me reflect on aspects of my personality.	4.43	0.53	4-5
I have been able to express difficult aspects of myself within the group.	4.29	0.53	3-5
The group framework — schedule, frequency, duration, and rules — seemed appropriate to me.	4.14	1.21	2-5
I would recommend this type of therapeutic group to others with similar difficulties.	4.71	0.49	4-5
Overall, I am satisfied with my engagement in the group.	4.43	0.79	3-5
Overall satisfaction with the group therapeutic intervention	8.86	1.07	7-10
The group intervention has contributed to my therapeutic process.	8.71	1.38	7-10

Qualitative analysis

Participants' written responses were organized into seven main themes highlighting both the therapeutic value and the challenging aspects of the group experience.

Safe and supportive group space

Participants described the group as a respectful and emotionally supportive setting where they felt listened to, accompanied, and able to share personal experiences without feeling judged. This sense of safety appeared to be one of the main factors facilitating participation: "a safe and supportive space where I do not feel judged."

Shared experience and interpersonal support

The group format allowed participants to recognize similarities between their own experiences and those of others. This seemed to reduce feelings of isolation and promoted a sense of belonging: "seeing that I am not the only one who has gone through these situations."

Awareness of relational and emotional patterns

Participants reported that the group helped them identify repeated relational patterns, defenses, and ways of reacting emotionally in interpersonal situations. Several patients linked this process to a better understanding of themselves and their relationships: "negative patterns that I repeat in my relationships."

Usefulness of therapeutic interventions

Therapist interventions were perceived as especially useful during tense or emotionally intense moments. Although some interventions were experienced as difficult or confrontational, participants also described them as helpful for gaining insight and connecting with relevant aspects of their functioning: "very hard, but they have helped me a lot."

Difficult aspects of the group process

The most challenging aspects were related to personal exposure, silence, fear of making mistakes, and concern about being judged by others. Participants also referred to the difficulty of facing unwanted or painful aspects of themselves within the group setting: "what I do not want to see in myself"

Learning and perceived changes

Participants described changes in self-awareness, self-compassion, emotional identification, and emotional regulation. They also reported a less defensive and more understanding way of relating to themselves and others: "I recognize my emotions more and manage them better." One participant expressed a particularly meaningful insight, stating that "I do not have to be the one who is struggling the most in order to deserve being listened to."

Suggestions for improvement

Some participants expressed a wish for more therapist feedback or intervention during the sessions. Others suggested periodically reviewing the group rules and aims in order to reinforce the therapeutic frame and maintain the group focus: "more intervention from the professionals."

Overall, participants experienced the group as demanding and sometimes uncomfortable, but also as clinically useful for promoting self-knowledge, emotional regulation, and reflection on interpersonal relationships.

Discussion

Results suggest that semi-open TFP-G group is well accepted by participants and may contribute to increased self-awareness, emotional regulation, and reflection on interpersonal patterns. The difficulties encountered by the patients in the group—such as the fear of making mistakes or the anxiety of being exposed or judged by others—may reflect core features of paranoid-narcissistic functioning characteristic of this patient population.

In addition, it is worth noting that the therapists conducting the group were in training, which may have influenced the nature and consistency of the interventions delivered—and could partly account for patients' requests for greater therapist involvement. Given the small sample size and descriptive nature of the study, further research is needed to explore its clinical utility in patients with personality pathology.