

Structural and Strategic revision

Structural Family Therapy

Salvador Minuchin is a family therapy pioneer who wrote several books:

- The families of the Slums (1967) – this pioneered his theory
- Psychosomatic Families (1967)
- Families and Family Therapy (1976)

The task of the structural family therapist is to restructure the family & eco-system in a way that allows the family & individual members to function 'better'.

Many Structural Family Therapy interventions are SPATIAL

Looks at relationship configurations within families, how individuals position themselves physically in family groups, hierarchies & coalitions within families

In terms of clinical applications, it is probably the most accessible and immediately useful idea in family therapy – imposing some kind of order on a family

Why is it so useful?

- Minuchin's ideas were developed with poor families & children who were struggling in the face of socio-economic stress factors.
- Families who feel powerless in society might sometimes feel overwhelmed by this & find it more difficult to feel empowered at home.
- Minuchin felt that to get the parents to 'take charge' would enable a smoother functioning of the family: children would feel more secure and protected & adults would be more confident & proactive.

Underlying Assumptions:

- Alterations in a family's beliefs is fundamental to change
- Alterations to the organisational structure will change symptomatic behaviour
- Assumptions of 'healthy family functioning' Families have an objective structure
- Families (people) are competent and capable of solving their own problems
- Rigidity of transactional patterns and boundaries prevents the exploration of alternatives
- Symptoms are a by-product of a structural system that is failing.
- Families are made of subsystems that are hierarchically organised with power distributed appropriately.
- All family systems desire homeostasis: to stabilise the system (Minuchin, 1974)

Key ideas:

- Families are regarded as evolving and capable of change
- Focus on organisational patterns in families and hierarchies
- Concepts of triangulation (for example: when you get a child stuck in a relationship with parents) and clear boundaries between family members and between subsystems
- Notion of boundaries: too close (over-involved or enmeshed)/too distant (disengaged, detached and over-rigid)
- Family subsystems = Parenting/executive, Spousal, Siblings