



Verbal Punishment in behavioral therapy. What does the therapist punish?

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Generally speaking, psychological research on punishment is limited, sometimes tendentious, frequently inconsistent and difficult to interpret in a clear and homogeneous way.

The present study is carried out to give an answer to this situation; its goal is to contribute to the development of a deeper and more accurate knowledge about the punishment process and, as it will be detailed further on, about its role in behavioral therapy.

The main goal of this study is testing how punishment is used in a real therapeutic context, determining what kind of the client's behaviors are punished and what kind of effects its application in the therapy development has.

Methods

Participants

21 therapy sessions recordings from 9 clinical cases led by 4 behavioral therapists with different grades of experience were tested from the private psychological center "*Instituto Terapéutico de Madrid (ITEMA)*" (Therapeutic Institute of Madrid).

Clinical work was carried out with adults and individually.

Therapist's Punishment Verbalizations

Punishment: "therapist's verbalization which, interrupting or not the client's verbalization, shows disapproval, rejection and/or non-acceptance of the behavior performed by the client" (Ruiz, 2011) as it's defined at SISC-INTER-CVT (Ruiz, 2011), a recently developed categorization system of client-therapist verbal behavior in session

Results

The therapist punishes a range of the client's behaviors, both verbal and non-verbal -it was only possible to infer it from conversation since cameras were not recording the clients and it was not possible to watch their non-verbal behavior..

In relation to the client's verbalizations, the therapist can punish them because of its *content* (its meaning, what they are expressing) or because of its *form* (how and/or when they are produced).

Frequently, the therapist uses punishment verbalizations to stop the client's speech, speak and call their attention to something or emphasize something important.

The therapist can also apply punishment to those behaviors which are produced out of the clinic, but only in an *indirect* way through the account of those behaviors told by the client. When the therapist punishes the client's account about their behavior out of the clinic, what the therapist is doing is punishing that behavior in an indirect way, using the connection established between the subject's behavior and the description that he or she makes about it.

Conclusion

It has been observed that the therapist applies their punishments to a range of client's behaviors, either verbal or non-verbal, and which can happen either in or out of the clinic, that impede or complicate the therapy progress and/or the achieving of the therapeutic goals ("anti-therapeutic behaviors"), since they would impede the optimal development of the intervention. Thus, verbal punishment is a resource used by the therapist to control the client's behavior, stressing those behaviors meaning an obstacle in the therapy progress.

The behaviors punished by therapists can be grouped into four categories: *Anti-therapeutic verbalization (content)*, *anti-therapeutic verbalization (form)*, *Speech, anti-therapeutic behavior*. This categorization system can become a base for different investigations on the dynamics followed by the clients' anti-therapeutic behavior in the course of the therapy, the therapists' answers to those anti-therapeutic behaviors, and the interaction between both of them.

References

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