

Expanding the terrain of psychoanalytic practice to diverse group settings in South Africa: Possibilities, challenges and future directions

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Abstract

The mental health care landscape in South Africa is characterised by high rates of mental illness and poor access to psychological care. Psychoanalytically-informed group interventions might provide opportunities for psychoanalytically orientated therapists to expand the terrain of their practice in a cost-effective way and reach larger numbers of people in need of psychological care. In this article, I critically present the arguments for and potential problems inherent in employing psychoanalytically-informed group interventions to expand the terrain of psychoanalytic practice in SA. I describe what is meant by psychoanalytically-informed group interventions and consider how expanding the terrain of practice might be achieved by applying psychoanalytic theory in diverse group contexts and training a broader range of practitioners to deliver psychoanalytically-informed group interventions. Two vignettes are used to illustrate these possibilities and highlight how expanding psychoanalytic practice in local group settings might be hindered by problems relating to professionalism and ethics, the need to establish an evidence base for practice, political implications of applying Western theoretical concepts within an indigenous African context, and structural problems with current training models.