# Support Groups for Children of Drug-Addicted Parents

## The Potential of Using Projective Techniques in Evaluation

Dr. Miri Levin-Rozalis

Ben-Gurion University
Beer-Sheva
Israel
rozalis@bgu.ac.il

# Projective Techniques

The rationale of projective techniques is that deeply held attitudes and motivations are often not verbalized by respondents when questioned directly. *Projective techniques* allow respondents to project their subjective or true opinions and beliefs onto vague stimuli.

# Among the most commonly used are:

- *Word association test*
- *Sentence completion test*
- *Thematic apperception test (TAT)*
- *Third-person techniques*
- *Rorschach*

# Projective personality tests

Are among the most controversial and

misunderstood psychological tests.

They have been attacked on a variety of

scientific and statistical grounds.

# Common approach

The common approach to projective techniques is as a tool for diagnosing the condition of the person being examined.

For their analysis, highly standardized methods and well-structured systems of administration, scoring, and interpretation are used.

# Our approach

- In our approach, the focus is not on an individual but on a phenomenon.

- As opposed to the restrictive analysis usually used in projective techniques, our method is a hermeneutic that assumes interpretative relations between text (answers given by subjects), the reader (evaluator) and reality (the examined phenomenon).

# The case

The welfare authorities conducted a nationwide program for children of drug-addicted parents.

The children participated in the program twice a week in peer groups, led by a pediatric psychotherapist together with a social worker specialized in work with families in which one or both parents were drug addicted.

## Children of drug-addicted parents . . .

live in a labile and insecure environment.

As a result, they are characterized by introverted behavior. Years of living with "a secret," of neglect, of role-reversal with their parents and of mistrust toward authorities make them a difficult population for treatment and research.

# Research challenges
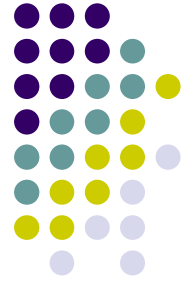
We confronted three main challenges:

- 1. A population that is very difficult to research:
  - a very diverse population (age, background)
  - young children
  - children of drug-addicted parents
- 2. We didn't have clear variables to look for. The program goals were phrased in a vague, general way.
- 3. We were afraid that changes, if they occurred, would be too faint to trace.

The solution we chose was to use a projective technique in order to reveal any internal changes that might have occurred.

**Partial findings concerning children who participated in "groups for children of drug users" (from interviews only):**

<u>Interviewed</u>:     **pre**   - 47 children in 8 groups
                                (out of 28 groups)
                    **post** - 28 children in 6 groups

The interview was an open, voluntary, anonymous interview, which included two very open questions:
        Tell me about a group....
        Tell me a story about a family....

# Stories

## PRE 1:

Once there was a large family of bears in a cramped house. They had a lot of honey and the foxes bothered them all the time. Thus they moved to the second forest, but more foxes came to bully them. The family said, "We better ignore them." And then they continued living there and didn't pay attention to the foxes.

## PRE 2:

There was a family that was destroyed because every day one member of the family died. Only one kid survived. He went to a foster family and he lived happily ever after.

## POST 1:

There was a family that lived near the forest where there was a wolf lurking for prey. One day the little girl went out and the wolf devoured her. The father went out to help her and it ate him, too, and the mother…. One after another they died.

# POST 2:

There was a family that went for a walk and they got lost and it was dark and they saw an animal and cried and cried for help...

# The method of work

1. Each researcher read the stories separately.

2. We compared themes, categories and characteristics.

3. Each researcher, separately analyzed the stories

4.  We compared the analysis and discussed

   disagreements.

5. In those cases where we couldn't bridge disagreements,

   we abandoned the story.

6. We compared before and after.

# Main findings

The main finding is the awareness of difficulties.

- The stories at the end of the year are much gloomier and indicate more distress.

- There is an increase in pessimism, of passive characteristics, of failure. There is less denial of harsh reality and less escapism to fantasy and happy endings.

- The loneliness and isolation didn't change.

- Any mention of drugs is absent before and after.

# In our approach, the focus is not on an individual but on a phenomenon

In this case, we were looking for changes that occurred in the coping abilities of the children.

we could say quite clearly that as a group, highly detectable changes took place. We couldn't say anything about any individual child.

Taking into account that our evaluation subject is the program and not the individual child, we didn't see that as a deficiency but rather as a benefit.

# Advantages

- By bypassing barriers of language, differences in the ability to articulate, and in consciousness and awareness, projective techniques are a powerful tool for revealing information that is inaccessible in other ways .

- By using the projective technique as a hermeneutic interpretive tool, we managed to overcome many of the technique's disadvantages, such as unreliable results when dealing with a non-mainstream population.

# Methodological problems

- How can we know that we have discovered everything there is to discover?

- How can we be sure that what we found is really what exists and not what we wanted or expected to find?

- Can we really claim that a different group of researchers will see the same things? Or that they will arrive at the same conclusions?

# Solutions

## *Validity*

Our way of working:

The process of reading the texts, separately and together, and again separately, and again together, increases the chances for many points of view to arise, and decreases the probability of missing any salient dimension.

The opportunity for everyone to listen to each other – and by doing so, to gain a broader range of possibilities – also opens up the possibility of more interpretations.

## *Reliability*

- After opening the maximum possibilities at the first stages of reading, the readers go through the process of inter-judging reliability at the last stage when those stories that created disagreement are abandoned.

- The picture that we got at the end of the analysis was coherent and congruent with other findings (for example: the children's behavior as observed in the group meetings, interviews with parents and group leaders). We could make a very strong claim for the truthfulness of our findings

# Ethical questions

The main ethical problem is the manipulation of the population.

Partial solution: Awareness of the problem

- The focus of the research is not the individual, but the group results and the phenomenon.
- It is anonymous analysis.
- In our best judgment, the benefit is higher than the risk.

# Thank you