



Existential Approach in Treating Self-Harming Behavior

D. Marappan, M.S. Mustafa*, R. Ahmad

Faculty of Education, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, 81310 UTM Skudai, Johor, Malaysia

Email: p-sarif@utm.my

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ABSTRACT

In this journal article counselor has discussed the use of Existential Approach in treating a client who has been diagnosed as depression with faulty-self talk which lead to serious self-harming behavior. In this approach and therapy session client was thought to learn to live as a fully functioning person by leading her to find the meaning of life, plus a few techniques are adopted in this case such as self-talk, homework and creating new meaning. Overall eight sessions and follow up's ensured the client is able to cope with and change the irrational thoughts as well as to perform positive thoughts and behaviors in her future.

Key words: Self-harming, faulty-self talk, irrational thoughts

INTRODUCTION

Counseling is a service that provides a solution to anyone who seeks help to understand their own behavior, cognition, personality and many more issues dealing with one's life. The range of counseling has no limit to any class in the society. Both the rich and the poor have the equal rights to get counseling service. Individuals face different kind of issues in their everyday life. These issues may cause them being emotionally disturbed or misbehave in certain situation without their awareness. The helping process is a two way relationship where it involves someone seeking help and someone willing to give help. Clients, who approach counselors, may come on voluntary basis, be referred from other settings or introduced by friends. All of them are seeking to fulfill their own goals and needs. A professional counselor guides and works together with the client to meet their basic goal, which is moving towards client's own needs (Cormier & Hackney, 2005).

PROBLEM ENCOUNTERED

Client encounters problems dealing with her emotions. Client has a lot of repressed feelings. She often feels very sad, lost and lonely especially when her friends isolated her. The client's unstable emotions affected her performance. She failed to perform well in her academic. In the end she was

dropped out of college. Client also failed to concentrate in her work especially when she was working. It leads her to put her fingers into slicer and holding hot trays with bare hands until serious injuries caused. Client's secondary problem was self-harm behavior. All the while, the client repressed her sadness and loneliness. In order to get away from the repressed feelings, it made the client feel lost and very uncertain with own actions. Client started to have faulty self-talk. Client doesn't know what she was doing. It leads her to grab something or unconsciously perform dangerous action to hurt her. In other occasion, client will harm herself in many different ways. Further exploration showed that client's self harm behavior caused by her own maladaptive thinking and negative self talk where she thinks that by harming herself or by causing physical pain she will feel numb with her mental pain and forget her repressed feeling.

The primary problem of the client was loneliness and faulty self-talk. Client has faulty self-talk where she thinks that when she hurt herself it will numb all her mental pain and repressed feelings. This faulty self-talk creates maladaptive thought that when she hurt herself it will give her a "lift" and divert her mental pain to physical pain. Whenever client feels sad or lonely, she has the faulty self-talk that lead to maladaptive thought where by hurting herself, she can ease her sadness and loneliness. She was always bothered by her maladaptive thought. Due to client's self-harm behavior, her

friend thinks that she is weird. So they tend to isolate her. She has no one to talk to or express her feelings, thus, she will start to have faulty self-talk. No one was willing to listen to her and she was afraid to express more especially on herself harm action because she was afraid that more people will think that she is weird. Client's parents do not understand why she acted so weird and self-harmed herself. After few years her parents requested her to move away from staying with them and told her to stay in an apartment all by herself. That's why clients feel very lonely. Therefore, further exploration towards the client is to make the client voice out all her repressed feelings and her irrational thought or thinking.

INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

Existential psychotherapy has been applied in the client's case. Under Existential psychotherapy, one of the concepts which are meaning and meaningless was chosen have been applied. There are three main steps in this concept which are discarding old values, meaninglessness and creating new meaning. The first step, discarding old values is where a client is taught to discard traditional values without finding suitable ones to replace. Later the counsellor guides the client to create new values system based on the way of client's current living and his/her way of being (Ivey, A. E. & Ivey, M. B., 2007). For example from this case study, client wants to change her old value of self-harming when feeling depressed to be a normal person.

Second step is meaningless. Meaninglessness in life leads to existential vacuum, emptiness and hollowness (Ivey, Ivey, & Zalaquett, 2009). Client must have the willingness to re-evaluate their purpose of life, to look for new meanings and has the courage to change direction to create life with purpose (Frankl, 1985). In this client's case, counselor explores it to see what the client can learn about the ways to live her life better. Counselor review client's problem behavior is self harm which was used by the client to cause pain. Client wants to cause pain in order to release her mental pain. Third step is creating new meaning. This is a Logo therapy. Client can discover meaning of life even suffering (Frankl, 1985). Finding meaning in life is by product of engagement, commitment to create loving and building life (Ivey et al., 2009). Based on our client, she ensures that she wants a normal life. There should be commitment on her to change her life, to build up a new life. Besides than Existential strategy, counselor has used Cognitive Behavior Modification (CBM) to help the client. It is another major alternative to Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy that focuses on changing client's self-verbalization. A basic premise of CBM is that clients, as prerequisite to behavior change, must notice how they think, feel, and behave and the impact they have on others. For changes to occur, clients need to interrupt the scripted nature of behavior so that they can evaluate their behavior in various situations (Meichenbaum, 1977).

There are three steps under cognitive behavior modification which are self-observation, starting a new internal dialogue and learning new skills. Self-observation is the beginning step of the changing process that consists of client learns how to observe their own behavior. In the beginning of the

session, internal dialogues by the client in counseling sessions are characterized by negative self-statements and thought. A critical factor is their willingness, ability to observe and listen to them. Then the sensitivity on thoughts, feelings, actions, physiological reactions and ways of reacting to others of client will be increased, (Ivey et al., 2009). Counselor makes client realize on her negative self-statement. At the same time, counselor guides client to create willingness, ability to listen and express the things that actually happen on herself and view this problem in new perspective where in this perspective client thinks that she is too young to die.

Then a new internal dialogue phase will be started whereby client learns to notice her maladaptive behaviors of self-harm and faulty self-talk. She should begin to see opportunities for adaptive behavioral alternatives. Client learns to change their internal dialogue and develop a new behavior where client challenged her thought that why she must commit suicide while she still young. From there, she develop a new behavior of not to harm herself and stop faulty self-talk to have the intention to be a normal person (Ivey et al., 2009). The last phase from cognitive behavior modification is learning new skills. This process teaches client to be more effective in coping skills such as positive self-talk, which are practiced in real-life situation. Client continues to focus on telling her positive statement and observing and assessing the outcome. Things that client learn from counseling sessions are stably influenced into their newly acquired behavior and its consequences. Then client will be treated as normal person by people around her with this new behavior. Client also learns to write diary as a review on her own behavior and thoughts in everyday life.

During the follow up sessions after two months, client should be able to lead normal life meaningfully with positive values. She will start to make and have friends around her, getting employ to work and loved by parents, friends or might even get involved in love relationship with a man. She won't feel lonely anymore. She will even have friends to express her feelings of happy or sad moment other than expressing it through writing a diary. This will also make client happier and love herself more so she would not self harm herself. People around her will not isolate her because she does not have the weird act of self-harm anymore. When client knows the meaning of her living, she will start to have new aim in her life and live her life more effectively.

RESULT

As a result of the counseling sessions, client has experienced few changes in her daily life and sets some desires, short-term and long-term goal to be achieved in future. The client realized that she is too young to die. Therefore she has reduced the frequency harming her-self. Besides that she had also approached her parents and managed to move in to her parents' house. As short-term goals, client has decided to overcome her faulty-self talk in order to stop her self-harming behavior by engaging herself in new activities such as finding a new job, sharing her feeling to her mother or joining any other social activities. As long term goal, client has desire to get married by the age of 36 years old.

STRENGTH AND CONTRIBUTION

Existential therapy helps clients to face the fear of death and non-being or confront the problem of personal freedom, searching of courage to live and dealing with the self-alienations and estrangement from others. By making clients aware of what they are doing and to get them out of the victim role and find the motivation to live. Existential therapy will also help client to be aware that they have the power to change the situation and grow toward maturity and independence. The client will have the courage to confront the creativity, anxiety, despair, fear, dread, guilt, nothingness, meaningless and isolation that they facing (Corey, 2009).

CONCLUSION

This approach help in bringing the client back into central focus. It emphasize on the central fact of human existence

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which is self-conscious and client's consequent freedom. Human refer their sense of being is controlled by external forces. Existentialists have contributed a new dimension to the understanding of the external forces such as anxiety, guilty, frustrations, loneliness, and alienation. Existential therapy will help the client to search for the value and meaning in life. It helps client to reflect on life and recognize their range of alternatives and to decide among them to start on a new path that consciously shaping their own life. Therefore it has brought the positive and healthy way for human being (Corey, 2009). One of the contributions of Existential Approach is its focus on the human quality of therapeutic relationship. This will decrease the chances of dehumanizing psychotherapy by making it a mechanical process. Existentialists reject the philosophy of the therapeutic objectivity and professional distance thus viewing them as unhelpful (Corey, 2009)

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