

GROUP COUNSELLING SKILLS AMONG COUNSELLING TRAINEES

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Abstract: *Group counselling is one of the important courses in counselling program. In order to ensure that counselling trainees are equipped with the skills to conduct counselling groups, this research investigated the group counselling group skills that were preferably used by the trainees. An education university in Malaysia that enrolled a number of counselling trainees was chosen purposive method. A number of 40 counselling trainees were involved in the survey, and 6 were interviewed. Results showed that the most frequently group counselling skills utilized is interviewing skills, less on focusing, and cutting off. The respondents also mentioned about their difficulty in utilizing group skills as interrupting people while talking is considered as rude in the society. Another significant aspect mentioned by the respondents were lack of focus in the session as they were more prone thinking of the appropriate response to be given in the session. Suggestion and implication were given at the end of the paper.*

Keywords: *group counselling skills, counselling students, cutting off, focusing, drawing out*

Introduction

Counselling is a helping profession that needs counsellors to be equipped with interviewing skills and group counselling skills. According to Masson, Jacobs, Harvill and Schimmel (2012), group sessions enables counsellors in dealing with many clients at one time. It also gives positive impact on clients as in group sessions, client are able to share experiences and ways to handle their problems. Clients in group counseling also gain insight faster and received experiential learning through group counselling sessions. Group counselling has been found to be an important subject as it has been found effective in addressing a variety of issues and problems with more clients at one time.

Group counselling has been found effective in dealing with primary school children (Truneckova & Viney, 2008), secondary school students (Aslina & Suradi, 2011; Mohammad Nasir et al., 2015; Mohammad Aziz Shah et al., 2015), and university students (Vassilopoulos & Brouzos, 2012). The effectiveness of group counselling may result from the first group task - that is to establish an atmosphere of safety and respect. The characteristics and skills of the group leader or counsellor is stated to be the important aspects that can contribute to the therapeutic environment (Jacobs, Masson, & Harvill, 2012). Group members are able to listen carefully to others, thus realize that they have something in common with other group members. The commonality arises in group work will enhance clients' or group members' self-awareness thus enhance positive development among members or clients.

Ample time and space for experiential learning is also provided in group counselling. By experiencing the therapeutic environment themselves, members are encouraged to listen to others, express themselves, and think of the main issues that has been focused in the group (Corey, 2012). At the same time, group leader or the counsellor serve as the role model in conducting groups, giving constructive feedback, and being the helper for the group members.

According to Truneckova and Viney (2008), research has shown that small-group group counselling is a useful and efficacious intervention, which improves the psychological functioning of not only primary school students, but also secondary school students (Aslina & Suradi, 2011; Mohammad Nasir et al., 2015; Mohammad Aziz Shah et al., 2015). However, the aspect of getting the skills is not largely investigated although group work has been listed as one of the major courses need to be offered to the counselling programs enacted by the Counsellor Board in Malaysia. Table 1 shows all the major component in training counsellors in Malaysia, including group work.

Table 1 Major Components in Training Counsellors

No.	Major Components
1.	Human development
2.	Helping Relationship
3.	Multicultural
4.	Group Work
5.	Career
6.	Research and Program Evaluation
7.	Testing and Measurement
8.	Professional Identity
9.	Practicuum
10.	Internship
11.	Elective papers or Research Project

According to Trunckova and Viney (2008), future research and programme evaluation is needed to endorse evidence-based group interventions with children. Trunckova and Viney also indicated that the skills and expertise of the group leader were useful and necessary as the intervention was able to meet some of the psychological needs of clients. Being a valued member of their group, and support given has put the group members a 'safe' place to share whatever feelings and thoughts that make them feel better. The clinical implications of these group processes for group leaders is stated as the need to provide simultaneously, support for each member, and for the group as a whole, and a need to model reflexive listening, provide encouragement for members to find the most meaningful changes in life for self-development.

As such, abundant research have been carried out to look at the validity and reliability of group modules and also the effect of the modules towards psychological aspects of target population in the study (Aslina & Suradi, 2011; Azmiza, Saemah & Ruslan, 2014; Mohammad Nasir Bistamam et al., 2015, Mohammad Aziz Shah et al., 2015). However, little effort is seen in looking at the group counselling skills among counsellor trainees. This study investigated the skills frequently used among trainee counsellors in conducting group counselling sessions.

Definition

The terms used in this study are group counselling skills, and counselling trainees.

i. Group Counselling Skills

According to Conyne (2012), group counselling is defined as a dynamic and valuable treatment device used by therapists or counsellors throughout the psychological disciplines, one that has proven effective in promoting change and growth in a variety of population and settings. This paper defines group counselling as a group of clients or group members that is led by a counselor or group leader in dealing with certain issues. Group counselling skills in this study refers to four skills in leading group work, including interviewing skills, focusing, drawing out and cutting off.

ii. Counselling Trainees

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2007), counselling trainees are students who are learning to be counsellors at any of the higher education institutions. This study refers to students who are taking group counselling course at one higher education institution in Malaysia that offers counselling program.

Objectives

The aim of the study is to investigate the:

- a. skills that mostly used by the counselling students.
- b. feedback of counselling students regarding the group counselling skills.

Methodology

There were two phrases of study as follows:

Survey on the counselling group counselling skills frequently used among counselling trainees

A survey was used to gain the percentage of difficulty in group counselling skills.

A number of 40 student were selected randomly. These students are the postgraduate students who were attending group counselling classes. A check list is given to them to identify the most difficult group counselling skills. The check list only listed four group counselling skills including interviewing skills, focusing, drawing out, and cutting off.

i. Feedback given by counselling trainees regarding group counselling skills

The feedback was collected in a focus group interviews. Only 6 participants involved in the interviews. Data were collected and arranged according to the themes found in the results.

Result and Discussion

The results are given according to the research questions.

i. Survey on the counselling group counselling skills frequently used among counselling trainees

The results for counselling group skills frequently used among counselling trainees are shown in Table 2. The results shows that the most frequently counselling group skills used among counselling trainees are interviewing skills (21 or 52.5%), followed by focusing (9 or 22.5%), drawing out (6 or 15%), and lastly cutting off (4 or 10%).

Table 2
The Counseeling skills used among counselling trainees

No.	Group Counselling Skills	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Interviewing skills	21	52.5
2.	Focusing	9	22.5
3.	Cutting Off	4	10.0
4.	Drawing Out	6	15.0
	Total	40	100%

ii. The feedback given regarding the difficulty of the

Based on the feedback given by the participants, most of them stated that they frequently found that the most frequent difficulty in group counselling is cutting off. The difficulty in utilizing cutting off is due to social practice that interrupting people while talking is considered as rude in the society.

The result also showed that drawing out is also difficult to be used as people rarely engage with group discussion. Another significant aspect mentioned by the respondents were lack of focus in the session. This is because most trainees are more likely thinking of the appropriate responses to be given in the session.

Conclusion

The results in this study shows that counsellor trainees prefer to use interviewing skills. This is similar to previous research that interviewing skills is the basic skills in the helping profession. The other skills are found rarely used by trainees due to the cultural habits and beliefs. Malaysian children usually are asked not to interrupt people who are still talking. Thus this has been found to be hindrance for trainees to lead the group in a better way. Future research should be done to identify the best module to teach group counseling skills.

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