



COSCA 9th COUNSELLING RESEARCH DIALOGUE

'Pluralistic Approaches to Research'

Tuesday 20 November 2012 – 10 am to 4 pm
Terraces Hotel, Melville Terrace, Stirling FK8 2ND

PORTFOLIO OF ABSTRACTS

Title: Bridging the gap between the academic and the practitioner – studying therapeutic effectiveness.

Presenter: Avigail Abarbanel, Counsellor/Psychotherapist, Fully Human Psychotherapy

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Presentation Format: Workshop

Aim:

To engage participants and draw their feedback and ideas on how a collaborative research model could work between research academics and clinicians.

Background:

At present evidence about therapeutic effectiveness comes to us mostly through controlled studies in universities. I believe there is a wealth of useful data from the more 'natural' environment of the therapeutic practice that does not make it into official studies. This might limit the usefulness or even relevance of research results to clinical practice and contribute to an unnecessary chasm between practitioners and researchers. Therapists like myself can only hope to contribute to mainstream research if we acquire research qualifications and join a research group at a university. For most of us in private practice or in counselling organisations this isn't an option. Scott Miller has long advocated that private practitioners collect data about effectiveness from their own practices. Even if practitioners did that, to the best of my knowledge there aren't any mainstream avenues for such data to be published.

I am interested in developing a mechanism/model to enable direct and rigorous dialogue and collaboration between clinicians and researchers. The aim of such a research model would be to allow clinicians to feed meaningful data into university research without needing to become professional researchers.

(At the moment I am interested specifically in therapeutic effectiveness but such a model could also be used for other topics.)

Method: I would like to run the workshop using a lively experiential model drawing on psychodramatic methods.

Title: What emotional impact does ending therapy have on a client and their internalisation process?

Presenter: Amanda Barge, Counsellor/PhD Student, University of Strathclyde

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Presentation Format: Paper

Background/Aims:

The aim of this pilot study is to examine clients' experiences of ending therapy and the possible role of the clients' post-therapy internal representations of their therapists. Little research has been carried out on this crucial stage of therapy and most of the other studies have been limited by their focus on either non-naive student counsellors or clients in extended psychoanalytic psychotherapies. This project is intended to explore the experiences of clients without a background in psychotherapy and who have also been involved in time limited person-centred-experiential psychotherapy

Method:

Using client post- and follow-up interview data from the University of Strathclyde's Research Clinic, we thematically analysed 21 clients' experiences, as reported in the semi-structured Client Change Interview. All the clients were seen by either a person-centred or emotion-focused counsellor, for 20 or 40 sessions.

Results:

Preliminary results suggest that clients experienced ending with their therapists as significant events. Last sessions sometimes left clients feeling abandoned and sad. Often the impact of ending was not explored in any depth before the last session, and clients struggled at times to be genuine about their reaction to the termination of therapy. However, some clients reported vivid representations of their therapists in their memories, which they could call upon when they needed support.

Conclusions/Implications:

The initial conclusions point to the need for the therapist to be more aware of their clients' experiences as they approach ending therapy. Open discussion of ending is likely to reduce the danger of the client leaving therapy feeling abandoned and at a loss. Therapists perhaps might want to consider taking extra responsibility at this stage of therapy and discussing support networks and the potential value of mindfully retaining memories of the work and their therapist.

Title: Conversations about counselling, spirituality and faith.
Presenter: Professor Liz Bondi, The University of Edinburgh
Contact Details: liz.bondi@ed.ac.uk
Presentation Format: Workshop

Background

This workshop is a form of action research that arises from and contributes to a Knowledge Exchange project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. It draws on oral history testimony collected during an earlier project from people who worked at interfaces between psychotherapy and religion in Scotland during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, and whose work influenced the ensuing development of counselling.

Aims

The project seeks to facilitate, and explore the impact of, conversations about counselling, spirituality and faith with a number of different groups including counsellors. In so doing it responds to calls from practitioners for more opportunities to discuss faith and spiritual issues in counselling and psychotherapy. The project also explores the use of narrative approaches to knowledge exchange and pathways to impact.

Method

The project uses a creative method called Readers' Theatre. Oral history testimony is drawn upon to create scripts in the form of short monologues, which are read aloud, listened to and reflected upon by workshop participants, who are invited to use them as a point of departure for conversations about counselling, spirituality and faith. Personal reflections are noted by participants on proformas. Group conversations are audio-recorded.

Results

As a form of action research, "results" operate cyclically and are defined initially by participants. The original project drew attention to calls for conversational spaces, which this project facilitates, explores and follows up.

Conclusions/Implications

As form of action research, the conclusions and implications that matter are those drawn by the participants. The project seeks to "capture" aspects of these by analysing audio-recordings of group conversations, proformas participants are willing to make available and follow-up conversations with participants.

Title: Couples, secrets and confidentiality: a re-evaluation of practice.

Presenter: Anne Chilton, Head of Professional Practice (Counselling) Relationships Scotland

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Presentation Format: Paper

This paper explores the issues raised when individual sessions are offered as part of a couple work contract. In such situations information that is unknown to the absent partner may be disclosed, which may present the couple counsellor with ethical and legal challenges depending on how they have contracted about the holding or disclosing of 'secret' information. Issues around contracting, confidentiality and the nature of secrets are explored alongside the results of a small survey of couple counsellors about this situation. Different types of contracting are also explored to see how they respond to such instances.

Implications for practice are also discussed in relation to both contracting and professional codes of practice.

Title: Training home carers in the use of contact reflections: a collaborative enquiry.

Presenter: Pam Courcha, MSc Student, University of Strathclyde

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Presentation format: Paper

Background

Home carers are increasingly working with people who have high level needs and are vulnerable due to dementia, mental health problems or learning disability many with significant communication difficulties. In November 2011 there were over 63,000 home care clients (Scottish Government statistics). 32% of people aged over 65 who received intensive long term care lived at home. Home carers receive little if any training in communication.

Aims

The research asked what happens when home carers are trained to use contact reflections. Pre-therapy contact reflections aim to restore or develop psychological contact.

Method

A collaborative enquiry method was used. Three home carers chose to work with clients with dementia. The research followed an action research cycle of learning, action and reflection over twelve meetings followed by one to one semi structured interviews. IPA was used to analyse the meetings and interviews. Presentations of initial findings were made to the carers and agency managers as part of the validation process.

Results

The carers used some contact reflections but they found this challenging at times. Mostly they changed their communication approach. They became more client focussed, created time to engage directly with clients, communicated more clearly and developed a reflective approach to their work. This facilitated achieving care tasks in the short time available. Carers also valued the increased interaction with their clients.

Conclusions and limitations

The quality of the relationship between home carers and clients with psychological impairment can be enhanced through training carers to use contact reflections. The action research methodology may have facilitated this because of the number of meetings and shared learning. Learning about contact reflections was in a context of a person centred approach and this may have resonated more with the carers. Further study using an outcome measurement and carers across different agencies might provide more reliable data on developing psychological contact.

Title: Person-Centered & Emotion-focused therapies for social anxiety.

Presenter: Professor Robert Elliott and Dr Brian Rodgers, University of Strathclyde

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Presentation Format: Paper

Background:

Good evidence exists for the effectiveness of humanistic-experiential psychotherapies (HEPs) with clients experiencing depression; however, evidence for its effectiveness with anxiety is much more sparse. Social anxiety (or social phobia) is a chronic condition with wide-ranging effects on interpersonal, occupational and psychological functioning. Almost all previous research on social anxiety has been carried out on CBT and psychopharmacological interventions. The purpose of this presentation is to present the results of an outcome study comparing two forms of HEP for clients with social anxiety: Person-Centered Therapy (PCT) and Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT).

Method.

Using a partially-randomized two group pre-post design (overall n = 40), we assessed client outcome on the Social Phobia Inventory (SPIN), CORE-OM, Personal Questionnaire, Inventory of Interpersonal Problems, and Strathclyde Inventory.

Results:

Using modified intent-to-treatment analyses, pre-post data for the PCT and EFT will be presented separately and combined, including pre-post significance testing, effect size, reliable change, and clinical significance calculations. Overall, clients in both conditions showed large pre-post gains, comparable or better than bench-marked previous research on CBT and medication; clients in EFT showed somewhat better outcomes and lower drop-out rates.

Discussion:

Despite limitation of being only partially randomized, this is to our knowledge the first study of bona fide humanistic therapies for social anxiety, and provides a basis for further research. Our results are promising and begin to provide justification for using HEPs therapies for social anxiety.

Keywords: Social anxiety, humanistic-experiential psychotherapy, outcome

Title: Clients' experience of the usefulness or otherwise of 1-1 counselling in addressing parenting problems.

Presenter: Caran Shergold, Counselling Co-ordinator, Safe Space

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Presentation: Paper

(This study was conducted by Seamus Prior and Siobhan Canavan in a collaboration between Safe Space and the University of Edinburgh)

Background

Safe Space offers a range of services to survivors of sexual abuse aged 12 upwards. Clients who refer to the adult counselling service are offered an initial session with the Counselling Co-ordinator before being allocated to a volunteer counsellor. During this assessment session, a significant proportion of both male and female clients disclose aspects of parenting which they find problematic, but following allocation for ongoing counselling, it seems that this concern receives little or no attention.

Aim

To find out whether clients perceived this problem to diminish or resolve of its own accord during the course of therapy; whether they experienced any difficulties in relation to addressing this in the counselling sessions available to them, and, if so, what the nature of these difficulties might be; whether they would value a group context which focuses specifically on exploring and addressing this aspect of their experience in addition to the 1-1 counselling which they receive.

Methodology

To maximise participation and data generation, the following empirical methods were employed:

- Focus group –attended by six service users
- Individual interviews –with five service users
- Questionnaires –from two service users

Findings

First and foremost, that counselling provides an opportunity for disclosure which results in a profound emotional unburdening and transformation. However, although some participants had addressed parenting concerns extensively in their counselling, others noted that the research was the first occasion they had ever spoken of these issues.

Implications

As well as recommendations for groupwork and external training provision, the researchers also recommended specific training for counsellors in addressing common areas of concern for parent survivors when they are not directly raised by clients themselves.

Title: Trial use of Core10 to evaluate participants' experience of eight session bereavement groups.

Presenters: Chris Vlasto, Palliative Care Counsellor, Fife NHS Trust

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Presentation Format: Paper

Background:

As Palliative Care Counsellor in Fife I routinely use the Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation system to evaluate bereavement counselling and therefore chose it to evaluate bereavement groups co-facilitated at a Maggies Centre.

The shorter CORE10 was selected because of its ease of use and focus on general client distress.

Aims:

To evaluate CORE10 as a tool for measuring members' experience and to consider what the routine use of the form reveals about the experience of group membership.

Method:

Groups consisted of six sessions of mutual support with educational input and a later follow up session.

The CORE10 form was introduced to the group. After members consenting, it was completed at the beginning of each session. In the final follow-up meeting the totals were added up and a graph was drawn up representing each member's experience. Participants wishing to discuss their forms were offered space to do so.

Results:

Complete data is only available for three groups. Completion of the form enabled members to focus on their experience and settle in to the group. It also highlighted areas of concern and topics for discussion. The graphs showed clearly the fluctuations of experience.

Conclusions/implications:

Conclusions are tentative due to the small number of sample groups. Results are encouraging. CORE10 is an easily administered way of mapping group members' experience. Participants do not find it intrusive and are able to use it to focus on being in the group. It reveals tentative patterns in group and individual experience. It is however not specific to grief and may not measure the intensity of grief. It may be of use in a number of other therapeutic groups.