COSCA 6TH COUNSELLING RESEARCH DIALOGUE
"MAKING RESEARCH RELEVANT: EXPLORING RESEARCH DESIGN & METHOD"

TUESDAY 24 NOVEMBER 2009
GOLDEN LION HOTEL, KING STREET, STIRLING

COSCA
Counselling & Psychotherapy in Scotland

PORTFOLIO OF ABSTRACTS

KEYNOTE PRESENTER

Professor Liz Bondi, the University of Edinburgh

Between Counselling and Research:
A Radical Argument for the Power of Example

Drawing on debates in critical social science, this paper advances a radical argument for the qualitative case study as a crucial and powerful approach to counselling research. I discuss what it means to develop an approach to research that is consistent with the values of counselling, and against this background I trace the changing fortunes of the clinical case study. I argue that critical social science provides powerful arguments through which to reclaim the power of reflexive case studies, personal narratives and autobiographical accounts.

Jane Balmforth

Professional Role: **PhD Student**
Institution/Affiliation/Workplace: **University of Strathclyde**

Abstract: **Paper**

'There wasn't any me in there': analysing a client-identified significant disclosure event in therapy.

Background
This study is part of a wider research project exploring clients' experiences of significant disclosure in therapy.

Aims
This qualitative study aimed to track the client's process of disclosure and identify what was helpful about the disclosure for the client using a variety of post-session instruments: the Helpful Aspects of Therapy (HAT) form (Llewellyn, 1988), the Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) interview (Elliott, 1986) and the Change Interview (carried out with clients after 10 sessions of therapy).

Method
The client completed the HAT form after each session. When the client indicated that she had disclosed something greatly significant to the therapist in Session 11 she was invited to participate in an IPR interview, which consisted of listening to the recording of the event and reflecting on her thoughts and feelings.

The effects and the context of the event were analysed using Comprehensive Process Analysis (CPA; developed by Professor Robert Elliott.)

Results
The data revealed that the client's process of identifying, processing and disclosing the material began well before the client entered therapy. The analysis also showed the significant extra-session work that the client engaged in, in addition to the work with the counsellor.

The client felt the disclosure was helpful in several ways: as an acknowledgement, an identification of an issue to work on and a personal aim for the future.

Conclusions/Implications

The HAT form and the interviews provided a rich source of data to explore this significant event. This study highlights how disclosure may contribute to the client's process of change and the importance of clients' extra-therapy work in resolving problematic experiences.

Rebecca Black

Professional Role: **MSc Student**
Institution/Affiliation/Workplace: **University of Strathclyde**

Abstract: **Paper**

'What Works for Students in Counselling?'
An Evaluation of Outcome and Change Processes in the University of Stirling Counselling & Wellbeing Service

Background
This study examined the counselling experiences of student clients who accessed the Student Counselling Service at the University of Stirling from February-May 2008.

Aims
This research aimed to evaluate the psychological change process among participants who accessed the campus counselling service, including how helpful or hindering counselling was.

Method
The research design involved quantitative and qualitative outcome measures of change processes among a small sample of participants [n=8]; CORE-OM questionnaires were used to evaluate participants' pre-therapy, mid-therapy and post-therapy levels of mental health and wellbeing. The study also investigated the subjective experiences of counselling among a smaller sub-sample [n=6], including various qualitative aspects of pre-counselling experience, challenging counselling experiences, and how participants initially heard about the campus counselling service.

Results
Quantitative results from CORE-OM questionnaires showed that participants demonstrated clinically high distress scores before therapy, which had reduced by the third session and further reduced by session six. Almost all participants showed statistically significant reduced CORE-OM scores which reflected non-clinical levels of psychological distress by the sixth session; this evidenced sufficient improvement to have changed most participants' scores to a level more representative of the general population than a clinical population. Generalised results from qualitative interviews with six participants after receiving six sessions of counselling showed positive interpersonal and intrapersonal changes. An analysis of the change process and what participants found helpful, hindering, difficult but tolerable (including suggestions they made to the counselling team) made up the qualitative aspects of this enquiry.

Conclusions/Implications

Participants interviewed [n=6] found counselling on campus generally helpful. Their statements demonstrated that counselling facilitated intra-personal growth, closely associated with interpersonal development; therefore personal growth positively influenced social confidence. A directional theory of change emerged from the data which validated the implication that effective therapeutic relationships facilitated clients' ability to utilise their own resources.

Pam Courcha

Professional Role: **MSc Student**
Institution/Affiliation/Workplace: **University of Strathclyde**

Abstract   **Paper**

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

Background
Shifting the balance of care from residential to home care for elderly people, people with learning disabilities or mental health difficulties means that home carers are working with a population of people who are vulnerable, many of whom have difficulty in communicating. In 2008 31% of people over 65 received over 10 hours week home care and in 2007 there were 3000 home care clients with mental health difficulties and over 3000 with learning disabilities.(Scottish Government Statistics).

Aims
The research asks what happens when home carers learn to use Pre-Therapy contact reflections. Contact reflections aim to restore or develop psychological contact and this may support clients in engaging with their home carers through improved communication. This may facilitate relationship building between the client and the home carer.

Method
The research is a collaborative enquiry within an action research framework. It will follow a cycle of reflection and action. The collaborative researchers are home carers based within one home care agency. They were recruited by invitation to an information session and then self selection. They will be trained to use contact reflections in responding to their clients and will feed back outcomes to meetings with the researcher. It is hoped to recruit at least one family carer.

Results

The research is in its infancy and at the time of writing the home carers are in the early stages of training. Home care clients and their families are still to be contacted.

The challenges so far have been in securing ethical approval from the University Ethics Committee which required two re-submissions. The issues that taxed them were around the risks to the client group, client consent and methodology.

This research addresses issues about the quality of caring relationships within the policy context of care in the community.

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Robert Elliott

Professional Role: **Professor**
Institution/Affiliation/Workplace: **University of Strathclyde**

Brian Rodgers
Institution/Affiliation/Workplace: **University of Strathclyde**

Rachel MacLeod
Institution/Affiliation/Workplace: **University of Strathclyde**

Susan Cornforth
Institution/Affiliation/Workplace: **University of Strathclyde**

Abstract: **Panel**

Examining the Outcome of Person-Centred/Experiential Therapy for Social Anxiety: Group and Single Case Analyses

Panel Organizer: Robert Elliott (University of Strathclyde)

Background
Good evidence exists for the effectiveness of person-centred/experiential (PCE) therapies with clients experiencing depression and post-trauma difficulties; however, evidence for its effectiveness with anxiety problems is much more sparse. Social anxiety (or social phobia) is a chronic, debilitating condition with wide-ranging effects of a person's interpersonal, occupational and psychological functioning. With few exceptions, previous research on social anxiety has been carried out on CBT and psychopharmacological interventions. The Social Anxiety Project at the University of Strathclyde was developed to remedy this situation by exploring and assessing the outcome of two different forms of Person-Centred-Experiential with clients suffering from Social Anxiety: traditional Person-Centred Therapy (PCT) and Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT).
The purpose of this panel is to present some of our initial outcome findings, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data in both group and case study designs. First, Robert Elliott and Brian Rodgers will present post therapy quantitative outcome data for the combined sample of 17 clients (10 in PCT and 7 in EFT) who completed therapy on a variety of outcome measures, including CORE-OM, Social Phobia Inventory, and Personal Questionnaire. Overall, clients showed substantial pre-post gains, as assessed by pre-post significance tests, large effect sizes, reliable change, and clinical significance methods, comparable to bench-marked previous research on CBT and medication. Although the sample was small and the study not complete, outcome appeared to be comparable for PCT and EFT.

Next, Rachel MacLeod and Susan Cornforth will each present single case studies, analyzed using Hermeneutic Single Case Efficacy Design (HSCED), a legalistic, mixed method case study model for evaluating client change and the efficacy of therapy, featuring cross examination of key evidence from the affirmative and sceptic perspectives, and three-judge adjudication process. MacLeod will present the results of an HSCED study of a client, "Carol", seen for 20 sessions of EFT. In this case, the three judges ruled unanimously (a) that this client had changed substantially over therapy, and (b) that EFT contributed substantially to this change. The study also provided useful information about the therapeutic processes involved in Carol's therapy and the therapeutic processes and the client characteristics that appear to have played a role, thrus providing a basis for generalizing to similar clients who receive EFT for Social Anxiety.

Finally, Susan Cornforth will present an ongoing HSCED study, of the case of "Lucy", who received 20 sessions of nondirective PCT. The judging process is currently underway, with verdicts due in mid-November, prior to the conference. The results from this case are more complex than the first case study, thus providing more of a challenge to the HSCED method. Along with the outcome results and judges' verdicts, further developments and innovations in the analysis and adjudication processes, piloted in this study, will be featured in the presentation.

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Hillarie Higgins

| Professional Role: | PhD Student |
| Institution/Affiliation/Workplace: | University of Edinburgh |

Abstract: Paper

Finding their Own Way: Using Attachment Theory to Explore Primary School Children's Research Participation in an "Empowering" Expressive Arts Curricular Project

Background
Through professional experience, I created the research concept of "aesthetic life narrative," which contextualized the philosophies of narrative and art therapy in an educational process of empowerment.

Aims
I was interested in the way power could be exercised by children through the proposed roles of artist, author and co-researcher, in both a social space and in an individual reflective space created through my research design.

Method
Using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, I designed and implemented a curricular pilot in a Scottish primary school, in which 9 year-old children were invited to process, express and share their life realities and the emotions they assign to these through various art mediums in a classroom space. Data was produced through individual interviews, which I then transcribed and returned to each child, in order to acquire their validation/affirmation of my interpretation, bringing about an ethical co-construction of data in an attempt to create the most complete description of a child's experience.

Results
My attempts to create an ethical research structure brought upon an unintentional therapeutic space and exchange with individual children, which led me to then use attachment theory to explore the ways in which individual children's home experiences affected their ability to participate in my emotional educational project, and influenced the ways in which they "used" me in their communicative process.

Conclusions/Implications
An implication of my research is how the "success" of an educational intervention is defined through individual children's negotiation with past and ongoing life experiences, while there is therapeutic potential in creating brief, new and disconnected reflective spaces in educational contexts. In addition, my experience demonstrates that the goals of our research design are often transformed through its interactive application.

Connie Johnson

Professional Role: **Student**
Institution/Afiliation/Workplace **University of Edinburgh**

Abstract: **Paper**

Emerging from the Shadow of Polio: A Case Study

Background
Many people who had polio as children in the 1950s and 1960s are now experiencing renewed symptoms in the form of Post Polio Syndrome. Along with physical symptoms, some polio survivors experience a resurgence of emotions that were not expressed during childhood but they often find it difficult to talk about their early experiences. The research explores some of the emotional and relational effects of early medical treatment for polio, along with social and cultural reasons for the difficulty in talking about this condition. Set within its historical context and through case study presentation, the research examines the experience of polio from a psychotherapeutic standpoint and proposes that a therapeutic relationship can contribute towards emotional and relational wellbeing for polio survivors.

Aims
To depict a therapeutic process from a client's point of view, in which a client finds out why it was difficult to talk about polio and to work through the emotional consequences of medical treatment for this condition.
To provide an evocative account of a therapeutic process in order to promote discussion for the purpose of expanding therapist expertise and posing theoretical questions
To present an experience of therapy to interested parties within the disabled community
To form the basis for further research on physically disabled clients' experiences of counselling/psychotherapy

Methodology
This is a reflexive hermeneutic case study, using heuristic methodology and a narrative approach to presentation. The research is situated in the context of other research findings on the experiences of polio survivors.

Conclusions/Implications
There is a strong correlation between the client's experience and memoirs of other polio survivors. Long-term psychotherapy is experienced as a way of facing and living with the effects of polio. The research challenges the idea of conditions of worth as the basis for person-centred personality theory (Warner, 2009) and poses questions about how social and cultural attitudes towards illness and disability can present within the counseling/psychotherapy profession.

Chin-Ping Liou

Professional Role: PhD
Institution/Affiliation/Workplace: **University of Edinburgh**

Abstract: Paper

The effect of voluntary work on University Students' Spiritual Health – a quasi-experimental study

Background
Increasingly many people experience feelings of inner emptiness, interpersonal isolation, and even depression. Various scholars considered these phenomena to be an outer manifestation of an inner reality – a decline in spiritual health. Spiritual health as an integral component of holistic health is understood in this study as an innate unifying energy, which enables individuals to build connection with self, others, and the Divine, to overcome adversity, to search for meaning in life, and to perceive and opine on the existence of a supernatural power.

Aim
The purpose of this study was to explore the effect of voluntary work on spiritual health.

Method
A quasi-experimental method was implemented in this study. This presentation discusses the outcomes of the implementation of a voluntary work curriculum, where one group of University students spend a set period of time in a voluntary helping role and another (the control group) does not. One major instrument: Spiritual Health Scale and a demographic information form were used to collect data. The descriptive statistic was employed to analyze participants' basic information; analysis of covariance, to compare degree of changes in the two groups before and after intervention.

Results
The findings indicated that the experimental group demonstrated significantly higher on the two "live a meaningful life"and "appreciation of nature"subscales as compared with the control group.

Conclusions/Implications
The voluntary work experience helped participants better understand and live out meaning in life, and become more open to meditate and learn from nature and daily events, thus to go beyond one's limitations and gain spiritual well-being. Viewing counseling goals as living more meaningful life and feeling more connected to others and environment, results of this study may contribute to better understanding of holistic health in the counseling field.

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Elizabeth Marley

Professional Role: **MSc Student**
Institution/Affiliation/Workplace: **University of Abertay Dundee**

Abstract   **Paper**

Self-help strategies to reduce emotional distress – what do people do and why? A qualitative study.

Background
Paper forms part of dissertation for MSc in Counselling

Aims

As most people undergoing psychological distress do not seek professional help turning instead to self-help strategies, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were carried out with 11 participants (2 male, 9 female) to explore self-help in detail and to find out where counselling might fit within such strategies. All participants were employed in the same office and lived in or near Glenrothes in Fife. All described their ethnicity as White Scottish/British and were aged between 27 and 60.

Method
Interview transcripts were analysed using a grounded theory approach.

Results
There were two key findings – firstly, that an individual's perceptions of his/her relationships with others is of predominant importance in the experience of distress, and secondly, that people tend to use self-help options which are already familiar to them rather than attempt new ones. Self-help options are usually cheap, readily accessible and easy to implement. However, managing distress is a complex and multidimensional process unique to each individual and the subsequent use of self-help is determined by the interconnection between the person's core beliefs, social or support networks and ideas about coping from family and society. Such beliefs may result in barriers to help seeking. The purpose of self-help strategies is both to distract the person from their problems and to contribute to bringing about physical and mental wellbeing

Implications
The findings are relevant to any community. Self-help is unique to the individual and counsellors need to understand and tap into this process. For policy makers and health service providers, a more holistic and personal approach needs to be taken around self-help materials in primary care to maximise their acceptability and uptake.

Katherine McArthur

Professional Role: **PhD Student**
Institution/Affiliation/Workplace: **University of Strathclyde**

Professor Mick Cooper

Professional Role: **Professor of Counselling**
Institution/Affiliation/Workplace: **University of Strathclyde**

Abstract: **Paper**

The practical and ethical feasibility of a randomised controlled trial for school counselling.

Authors
Katherine McArthur – Researcher, University of Strathclyde
Mick Cooper – Professor of Counselling, University of Strathclyde
Nancy Rowland – Director of Research, Policy and Professional Practice, BACP
Sue Pattison – Lecturer in Counselling, University of Newcastle
Karen Cromarty – Senior Lead Advisor, Children and Young People, BACP.

Background
Research has demonstrated the potential benefits of school counselling through qualitative and quasi-experimental studies. However, more rigorous methods are increasingly demanded by funders, with randomised controlled trials (RCTs) remaining the "gold standard". This experimental design, which focuses on quantifying the value of counselling for a whole population, may be counter-intuitive to a counselling culture which values individual experience, but the kind of evidence it can produce is crucial in order to impact policy.

Aims/Method
To date, an RCT of secondary school counselling has not been conducted in the UK, and the first step towards this goal is a pilot study to identify a procedure which is both feasible and ethically sound. A team of researchers from the Universities of Strathclyde and Newcastle and the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) have recently completed the first pilot RCT of counselling in UK secondary schools. The aim was to balance person-centred values with the need for rigorously scientific methods, and the study incorporated qualitative interviews with young people to explore the impact and potential value of the counselling as well as the research itself.

Results
The main outcome of the study was that with adequate planning, an RCT of school counselling is feasible in terms of recruitment rates and other practical considerations. Furthermore, such a study can fit into an ethical, person-centred way of working. Young people and teachers valued the research.

Conclusions/implications
This study paves the way for a full RCT of school counselling, which has the potential to increase access to counselling in schools nationally.

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Professor John McLeod

Professional Role: **Professor of Counselling**
Institution/Affiliation/Workplace: **University of Abertay Dundee**

Dr Dot Weaks

Co-Authors:
Heather Wilkinson
Ron Johansen
Julia McLeod

Abstract: **Paper**

Changing practice: the impact of counselling skills training on community mental health nurses working with people with dementia

Background
A diagnosis of dementia presents substantial challenges to well-being and support networks. At present, there is little psychological support offered within the NHS to people diagnosed with dementia.

Aims
The aims of this study were to examine the effect of participation in a COSCA certificate in counselling skills course, along with follow-up supervisory support, on a group of community mental health nurses who work with people with dementia.

Method
Participants were followed up over a 15-month period, using a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods.

Results
The results of the study indicated that involvement in the course had a significant personal impact on nurses in this group – all of them reported areas of meaningful personal learning. Key characteristics of the experience of being on the course were identified as contributing to change: permission to make mistakes, being part of a supportive group, on-going practice with feedback, and time to consolidate and apply what had been learned. Nurses described a range of shifts in their approach to their work, encompassing relationships with colleagues as well as engagement with people with dementia and their families. These work-related changes mainly occurred in three areas: a more reflective stance, and being facilitative rather than directive, and greater confidence in exploring emotionally-charged issues.

Implications
The implications of this study are that the COSCA certificate in counselling skills structure represents a practically-relevant form of training for health professionals working with people with long-term health conditions, particularly if supplemented by on-going supervisory support and mentoring.

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Deborah Roebuck

Professional Role: **PhD Student**
Institution/Affiliation/Workplace: **University of Strathclyde/**
                                    Glasgow Caledonian University

John McLeod

Professional Role: **Professor**
Institution/Affiliation/Workplace: **University of Abertay Dundee**

Abstract: **Paper**

Effectiveness of counselling in primary care for clients with physical health problems compared to clients with psychological problems

Background
The belief that the mind and body are inextricably linked dates back to the time of Hippocrates. Researchers have found interactions between the physical course of illnesses and psychosocial factors. Psychological interventions have been found to be effective in the treatment of Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS).

Aims
The aim of this study was to examine the effectiveness of counselling in a primary health care setting for clients with physical health problems (PHP) and how they compared to clients with psychological problems only (PPO). The Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation – Outcome Measure (CORE-OM) measure, and goals questionnaire were used at the beginning and end of therapy to evaluate outcomes.

Methods
Data was studied from 39 adult clients (age range 21-61 years old) who received therapy and completed the CORE-OM and Goals Questionnaires at the beginning and end of their therapy. Clients were classified as suffering from a PHP if the GP referral, screening/interview data or Goals questionnaire explicitly noted a diagnosed physical health problem.

Results
Clients in the PHP group reported a range of long-term health conditions, including heart disease, diabetes and multiple sclerosis. Both groups began therapy with equivalent CORE-OM scores and goal ratings. Only clients in the PPO group showed a marked improvement in CORE-OM scores although both groups showed a marked improvement in goals questionnaire scores. Clients in the PPO group showed a greater improvement in goals questionnaire scores. On the basis of these data, counselling appeared to be of limited effectiveness for clients with chronic health problems.

Conclusions
The CORE-OM may not be an effective measure for PHP clients, or counselling in primary care may not be effective for PHP clients. The implications for the role of counselling in primary care, and strategies for evaluating its effectiveness, are discussed.

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Andrew Sweeting

Professional Role: **MSc Student**
Institution/Affiliation/Workplace: **University of Abertay Dundee**

John McLeod

Professional Role: **Professor**
Institution/Affiliation/Workplace: **University of Abertay Dundee**

Abstract: **Paper**

Public perceptions of the credibility and usefulness of CBT, person-centred therapy and counselling

Background
There is considerable evidence that people seeking therapy express preferences for different approaches and intervention styles, and that these preferences have an impact on both the development of the therapeutic alliance, and eventual outcome.

Aims
The aims of this study were to examine perceptions within the Scottish general population of the credibility and usefulness of forms of therapy that are widely available within that cultural setting.

Method
Participants (29) were asked to read expert-generated descriptions of CBT, person-centred therapy, and counselling, and to indicate their preferences for each approach. Participants were also invited to comment on the reasons for their choices.

Results
The results of this survey indicated that participants gave higher ratings to CBT and counselling, rather than person-centred therapy. Overall, counselling was the most favoured option. A variety of reasons were provided to account for these choices.

Implications
The findings of this study suggest that there is support for all three of the therapy approaches examined in this investigation. To ensure an appropriate level of client choice, it may be important for policy-makers to ensure that a range of therapy options are available to service users. It may be significant that counselling, which was described in this study as a flexible approach that incorporated both problem-solving and relational elements, was most highly valued by participants. Further research is necessary, with a larger sample, to determine the generalisability of these findings.

Richard Wong

Professional Role: **PhD Student**
Institution/Affiliation/Workplace: **University of Edinburgh**

Abstract: **Paper**

Suffering and its transaction: a process of self-reflection and understanding

Background
Considering the language of suffering was co-constructed by client and therapist, this qualitative research uses the lived experience of the 'I', the first-person point, to explore the process of 'suffering transaction' in counselling process, in which the experience of suffering was embodied in one's language with the shared socio-cultural and political background issues, and contextualised by the ethics of mutual understanding. The experience and the context of 'suffering', in this research, are about two client's stories of having a lifelong disabled child and about researcher's own reflection of living in a family with a disabled sibling. The counsellor is also the researcher of this study, who engaged in the counselling process with these two clients conducted in a hospital in Taiwan. The whole counselling dialogues along with researcher's supervision transcript, therapeutic notes and the research journal are designed as the raw qualitative data.

Aims
This research is aimed to explore the process of 'suffering transaction' in which both client and counsellor's lived experience of suffering developed other's verbal responses for the other. How counselling ethics contextualises the inter-subjective story of suffering and how socio-cultural and political background issues frame the context of 'mutual understanding' is explored in this research.

Methods
Considering the contextual reality of the phenomenon of 'suffering', this research uses the hermeneutic phenomenology as the background methodology. Narratives of counselling will are regarded as the textual basis for exploring the phenomenon of suffering transaction.

Results and implication
This research shows the ethical terms and the socio-constructional context of 'suffering transaction'. The two counselling praxes showed how the experience of suffering could be transacted into the language between the counsellor and client. This process was inter-subjective. Due to the shared socio-cultural background, counselling actions of mutual encounter and understanding develop both the client's and therapist's experience of self-understanding and their responses for the other. By counselling ethics, the lived experience of suffering is contextualised from socio-cultural embodiments to understandable language. This process permit the 'suffering' transacted between client and counsellor.