

COSCA 8th COUNSELLING RESEARCH DIALOGUE

*“The Cultural and Social Contexts of
Counselling & Psychotherapy”*



PORTFOLIO OF ABSTRACTS

Title: Introducing the Voluntary Sector Counselling Research Network: A new practice research network on voluntary sector counselling in Scotland
Presenter: Dr Joe Armstrong
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Presentation Format: Workshop

Keywords: Research; voluntary sector; counselling; Scotland

Background: There is now in existence a vast array of voluntary sector counselling services in Scotland ranging from large organisations with a national network of branches to smaller locally based agencies. Voluntary organisations make a significant and vital contribution to the overall balance of counselling provision in Scotland. Yet, despite the fact that so much counselling is being delivered by counsellors in voluntary agencies, it is striking that so little research has been generated related to this area of practice.

Aim: This paper will present plans currently being developed by the University of Abertay Dundee and COSCA to establish a Practice Research Network (PRN) on voluntary sector counselling in Scotland.

Method: A brief account will be provided concerning the background and rationale for developing a PRN. Namely, to create a framework within which counselling practitioners, researchers, and other relevant stakeholders can work together to address research questions which seek to enhance practice and understanding of voluntary sector counselling in Scotland. The presentation will then focus on outlining the aims, objectives and structure of the PRN, before offering some thoughts on its potential, and the challenges that may have to be overcome to facilitate its development and success.

Conclusions/Implications: The successful establishment of a PRN will provide a forum through which research questions and dialogue can be facilitated concerning the ways in which the nature and form of contemporary counselling practice in voluntary settings in Scotland is shaped by the cultural and social contexts within which it is delivered. It is hoped that a co-ordinated and collaborative approach to research into this area of practice will help to engage more practitioners in research that is relevant to their everyday practice, and make a positive contribution to enhancing the future development of voluntary sector counselling in Scotland.

Title: How do counsellors/psychotherapists respond to clients who introduce astrological beliefs into therapy sessions?

Presenter: Ada Blair

Contact Details:

Presentation Format: Paper

Background: This project was conducted as part of a Masters in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David.

Aims: To consider ways in which counsellors/psychotherapists work with clients' disclosed astrological statements/beliefs within therapy: to ascertain the extent to which their training and subsequent therapeutic approach factor in interactions and the reported influence, if any, of personal opinions/beliefs/experience concerning astrology. For the purposes of this project astrology is considered to be a religious or quasi-religious belief which, to many scientifically trained practitioners, is seen as non-rational and/or non-justifiable. It is hoped that the project will contribute to the debate regarding the place in therapy for clients' declared religious and/or quasi-religious beliefs including astrology.

Method: Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed, specifically questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Questionnaires were given to 21 counsellors/psychotherapists from a range of therapeutic approaches working within Edinburgh and the Lothians. Interviews were conducted with four respondents.

Results: 19 questionnaires were returned. 84% of respondents professed some belief in astrology and 89% had clients who had introduced astrological belief into therapy. 79% of respondents felt their training and approach impacted on how they interacted with clients and 42% believed their personal beliefs/opinions/experience factored.

Conclusion/Implications: No individual orientation appeared more accepting than another of clients introducing astrology into therapy. It may be that therapists with belief or interest in astrology are more "alert" to astrology being introduced. Some mental health practitioners have seen a client's religious beliefs as having a pathological basis. The place in therapy for clients' religious and/or quasi-religious beliefs including astrology, merits further consideration. The experiences of clients in therapy who are "believers" in astrology is another area that deserves further study.

Title: Counselling, psychotherapy and religion: reclaiming forgotten histories; making new meanings

Presenters: Liz Bondi and Alette Willis, The University of Edinburgh

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Presentation Format: Paper

Drawing on evidence generated by a current research project on theology and therapy together with an earlier project on voluntary sector counselling, this paper draws attention to and examines the influence of religion in the development of counselling and psychotherapy services in Scotland. The paper traces the longstanding influence of the churches as organisations committed to the provision of social welfare. It also illustrates the centrality of religious faith to many of those individuals who have played critical roles in the development of non-affiliated and apparently “secular” services. The paper argues that recent trends within the professions of counselling and psychotherapy have tended to eclipse from view the deeply ingrained influence of religion, in favour of a more clinically-oriented and secularised story about their past, present and future. Reclaiming a different story that reaches across the boundaries between the religious and the secular, and between personal meaning and the clinical treatment, is especially important at this moment given significant changes in the contexts in which counselling and psychotherapy operate. The paper discusses ways in which this alternative story might be disseminated among practitioners, providers, commissioners and service-users.

Title: Person-Centred Practice and the Metaphysics of Unity of Ibn Arabi in the Postmodern Context

Presenter: Dot Clark

Contact Details:

Presentation Format: Paper

This paper presents aspects of a dialogue between Person-Centred practice and the Metaphysics of Unity of Ibn Arabi, an Islamic mystic who died in 1240 CE. It arises from a process of making meaning out of lived experience. The Person-Centred concepts of the Actualising Tendency, the central role of conditionality in pathology and the role of unconditionality in therapeutic change are examined in relation to Ibn Arabi's understanding of the nature of Reality in the light of the Unity of Existence which asserts that inner and outer are not separate.

Two issues raised by this dialogue concern the nature of the self and what it means to trust process. Rather than assert any overarching, transcultural equivalence between two very different traditions, the themes which arise between them are explored in the context of current conversations taking place in feminist and postmodern theology. Daphne Hampson's post-Christian, feminist theology is drawn on here to support an expanded understanding of the self which is deeply relational. John Caputo's postmodern Theology of the Event contributes to an understanding of what it means to be responsive to whatever new is trying to happen through our inescapable situatedness.

Both these thinkers contribute to expanding the dialogue and locating it within a broader current conversation which challenges familiar dualisms: not only subject/object, immanent/transcendent, absolute/relative, absent/present; but also secular/spiritual. The argument made here is that Person-Centred practice can be understood beyond the context of therapy as having relevance to deepening our understanding of what it is to live well and meaningfully in a postmodern world..

Title: What concerns counsellors working with interpreters in therapeutic settings?

Presenter: Merih Bektas Fidan

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Presentation Format: Poster

Keywords: interpreters, counsellors, triadic relationship, communication, ethnic minority

Aim/Purpose: To investigate the experiences of counsellors working with non-English speaking clients and interpreters in a triadic psychotherapeutic relationship.

Design/Methodology: Focus group was used to find out main issues and concerns. Five counsellors with the mean age of 39.6 took part in a semi-structured group talk.

A socio-demographic questionnaire was used to establish the descriptive characteristics. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the themes and categories emerged.

The ethical approval was obtained from Leicester University. Conversations were recorded and transcribed.

Results/Findings: The analyses showed that counsellors were mostly concerned about understanding their clients, interpreters and cultural issues they bring in.

The counsellors described working with non-English speaking clients through interpreters as a blind process; dealing with unexpected; being shocked; and offering a lot of reassurance to both sides.

Their experiences with interpreters include feeling unease because of their presence; being linguistically dependent on the interpreter; and being shocked by the stories they heard.

Counsellors reported that being flexible and sensitive, gathering the information needed beforehand, establishing trust and bond with clients and interpreters; and adopting an intercultural approach as vital skills for counsellors in working effectively. They argued that counsellors must have some information about or a prior conversation with interpreters before the sessions in order to establish the trust.

They regarded the following as main obstacles in developing a satisfying therapeutic relationship: counsellors not appreciating cultural diversity; a mismatch between clients and interpreters; interpreters' lack of knowledge in mental health; and both counsellors and interpreters not getting right the training and supervision.

Several re-categorisations produced nine main categories like counsellors' perception of their job; requirements of an effective therapeutic relationship etc; and twenty –two subcategories like good practice issues; presented characteristics of the triad etc.

The researcher worked further on finding potential super-ordinating themes for counsellors which include Understanding; Competence; Support; and Professionalization.

Research Limitations: Due to the small number of participants generalisation cannot be made.

Conclusions/Implications: The research aimed at informing academia and related fields in order to develop culturally sensitive mental health services and tailored training and supervision programmes towards working with ethnically different clients and interpreters.

Title: Where should I stand? How Chinese traditional tutor-student ethic affects the training process of being a counsellor in Taiwan

Presenter: Chun-Yu Hsiao, PhD student in counselling and psychotherapy, University of Edinburgh

Contact Details:

Presentation Format: Paper

Abstract:

As a Taiwanese counsellor who studies in U.K., I am interested in how Taiwanese counsellors experience the interaction and conflict between western counselling knowledge and traditional Chinese values during the process of being a counsellor. In general, tutors and supervisors play crucial roles in helping trainees to develop their theories, skills, attitudes and values as effective helpers. However, 'Tutor-student' relationship is one of the most important interpersonal relationships in Chinese Confucius context. Different from my learning experience in Taiwan, the interaction among my U.K. supervisors and me always challenge my original attitude of tutor-student relationship. This research aims to understand how the Chinese traditional tutor-student ethic would influence the training process of being a counsellor. Semi-structured interviews were conducted. Those stories of 11 Taiwanese beginning counsellors' who have less than five years experience have been explored. Through analysing the cultural factors in tutor-students relationships in the counselling domain in Taiwan, I discovered that Taiwanese trainers, as also the 'teacher', faced the overlapping and confusing expectations of embodied Chinese traditional teacher and Western counsellor expert. These expectations were not only from their students but also from themselves. Consequently, trainees inherited conflict and confusion.

Title: The effectiveness of young people addiction counselling

Presenter: Patricia Joyce – MCA Development Worker Msc. Student Strathclyde University

Contact Details:

Presentation format: Paper

Background

The growth of young person specific generic counselling services in the UK has produced a robust body of evidence that shows clearly that therapy is effective when working with adolescents and is associated with large reductions in psychological distress. Investigating the practice of offering young person specific addiction counselling however has proven to be relatively uncharted waters to date.

Aims

The aim of this study explores the effectiveness of young person specific addiction counselling

Design

Practice based natural outcome study comparing levels of psychological distress at baseline and endpoint for young people affected by their or another's addiction. Additionally, post counselling self reporting by clients to ascertain satisfaction with the service.

Method

Participants were 69 young people attending a voluntary addiction specific counselling service in Moray. The outcome measure utilised was YP-CORE. To minimise data loss, participants were invited to complete weekly outcome measurements, such that a last observation could be carried forward for young people who had unplanned endings or were still in the counselling process at the end of the study period. 35 Post Counselling Satisfaction Questionnaire (PCSQ) were available for analysis on service effectiveness from the viewpoint of the client.

Results

Mean levels of distress on the YP CORE reduced from 17.62 (SD = 7.88) at start point to 12.06 (SD = 7.21) at end point, giving a standardised effect size of 0.71 (95% CI = 3.90 -7.23). Self reporting results from PCSQ highlighted the value of the service with over 85% young people being either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the service

Conclusions

Young person specific addiction counselling within a youth setting is associated with reductions in psychological distress. Additionally, mental health improvements pre to post intervention are comparable to other young people services in the UK. The findings also highlight service delivery in this way was valued by the client group.

Title: What do clients want? A practice-friendly review of research into client preferences for therapy

Presenter: Professor John McLeod

Contact Details:

Presentation Format: Paper

Background. A growing body of research suggests that clients enter therapy with ideas about the kind of therapeutic processes that will be most helpful for them, and that fulfilment of these preferences is associated with positive outcomes.

Aims. To review the research literature on client preferences and knowledge in relation to therapy.

Method. A practice-friendly literature review was carried out. Relevant studies were identified for a systematic search of databases, and summarised in terms of their implications for practice.

Results. The findings of research in this topic indicate a set of dimensions along which clients vary in respect of their views about what would be helpful in therapy. There appears to be some fluidity or flexibility in these views, with clients being open, to some extent, to therapy ideas and methods that are not consonant with their preferences. Clients whose preferences are not reflected in the therapy they receive frequently report disappointment with their therapy.

Conclusions/Implications. The implications of this review of research are that it is important for therapists and therapy organisations to develop ways to engage with client preferences. At the same time, there are many questions about the sources and strength of client preferences, and therapist strategies for collaborative exploration of these factors, that require further research.

Title: Counsellors' conceptions of hope and its function within therapy.

Presenter: Dr Denis O'Hara

Contact Details:

Presentation: Paper

Other author(s): Fiona O'Hara

Background:

While hope has consistently been identified as a central feature of therapeutic change, particularly the client's hope, little research has explored the nature and influence of the therapist's hope.

Aims:

This paper reports part of a study on counsellors' hope. The wider study aimed to explore the relationship between counsellor's hope, self differentiation, and epistemic style, especially how the latter two constructs influence counsellors' levels of hope. In addition, the study also sought to identify the counsellor's understanding of hope particularly as it is operationalised within the therapeutic context.

Method:

The study used a mixed methods design using qualitative and quantitative questionnaires with 60 participant therapists as well as 10 semi-structured interviews. The quantitative aspect of the study employed a within-subjects correlational design and the qualitative aspect relied on a grounded approach to the data. Only the qualitative data will be reported in this paper.

Results:

The participant therapists defined hope and its function within therapy in a range of ways including some contradictory conceptions. Participants often expressed a semi-surprised recognition of the profundity and centrality of hope within the therapeutic process. The place of the therapist in contributing to a number of hope-related tasks such as exploring the possibility of hope, searching for a hidden but *a priori* hope, constructing hope with the client, and holding hope for the client were identified. A number of hope-based strategies used by participants were also identified.

Conclusions:

The range of conceptualisations of hope and its place within therapy demonstrated its multidimensional nature. Participants acknowledged the importance of hope within the therapeutic process but recognised that this awareness was often more tacit than explicit. A range of therapist hope-supporting functions and tasks were identified in the study and suggestions for future research were offered.

Title. Attitudes towards counselling and help seeking behaviour among Muslims in a Scottish city

Presenters: Gillian Taylor and Professor John McLeod

Contact Details:

Presentation Format: Paper

Background. There is evidence of underutilisation of counselling and mental health services among the Muslim community in Scotland, despite there being a perceived need for these services among this particular group.

Aims. To carry out a survey of the views about counselling, and help-seeking for psychological problems, of Muslims living in a Scottish city.

Method. Research participants were recruited from a Mosque, and a University Islamic Society. Attitudes to counselling were measured using a standardised questionnaire, the *orientation to seeking professional help* scale.

Results. Completed questionnaires were received from 73 participants, reflecting a wide range of ages and educational levels. In general, participants reported overall positive attitudes to counselling, that were similar to findings from surveys of the general UK population. However, more negative attitudes were reported in younger (18-25 years) participants.

Conclusions/Implications. The findings of this study are limited by the sample, and by the fact that the questionnaire did not allow participants to voice their own personal experiences. It would be valuable for further research to be carried out, that addressed these limitations. The results of the survey imply that Muslim underutilisation of counselling services may not be due to the attitudes to counselling of members of the Muslim community, but instead may be attributable to other factors, such as their knowledge of available services, or issues around access to these services.

Title: Pre-analysis and Re-presentation of the Translated Data and Cultural Loss

Presenter: Richard Wong, PhD student in counselling and psychotherapy, University of Edinburgh

Contact Details:

Presentation Format: Paper

Background:

When I was presenting my qualitative data which was collected as Chinese transcript into English, language itself was developed as the phenomenon in which it had created a barrier between the qualitative analyses itself and the researcher's own life history. From a phenomenological perspective, two different languages, which contain two different meaning structures and symbolic systems, had created a 'cripsation' in which a researcher has to suppress the anxiety of using the second language and the loss of not-using the mother language. From a reflexive account, by arguing that the anxiety and loss are socio-cultural, I will discuss how Gee's poetic method was involved and developed as the pre-analysis of my doctorate study.

Aims:

From a phenomenological perspective, I will show how the issues of anxiety and loss were developed in the process of conducting a qualitative study. I will show how using Gee's poetic representation I could cope with my cultural loss and anxiety.

Results and implication:

This research showed a 'pre-stage' of qualitative data analysis in which a bilingual researcher was engaged in a cultural context of loss and anxiety. From the reflexive way of accounting on the qualitative data, the phenomenon of 'cripsation' was revealed by engaging myself into two different meaning systems. An argument has been made as a conclusion, in which a researcher could use a creative way of representing the data which is 'not' perfectly translated, but creates an interactive understanding with his readers. Example of poetic representation will be showed and discussed.

Title: Suffering Transaction: 'Suffering', its Ethical Values, and Moral Weight in a Counselling Relationship

Presenter: Richard Wong, PhD student in counselling and psychotherapy, University of Edinburgh

Contact Details

Presentation Format: Poster

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 the counselling process, in which the experience of suffering is explored phenomenologically by its ethical values and weights developed between a counsellor and a clients. From Levinasian's perspective of 'ethics for the other', a phenomenological model of 'suffering transaction' was offered and the moral values codified by Chinese culture were explored.

Aims:

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

Results and implication:

This research shows the ethical terms and the socio-constructional context of 'suffering transaction'. The two counselling sessions showed the stories of suffering within the context of Taiwanese socio-cultural and political background issue. An interpretative model of 'suffering transaction' was developed after a phenomenological analyses of the transcribed counselling sessions. Between client, counsellor and the socio-cultural reality, in this study, 'suffering' ,through the ethical process of understanding the other, is given a map of re-thinking about the transactive values between language and cultural embodiments of ethics/morality.

Title: 'Relationship Counselling in the Context of the Voluntary Sector'

Presenter

Presenters: Stuart Valentine and Helen Weston

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Presentation Format: Workshop

The workshop would be delivered by Stuart Valentine and Helen Weston, Head of Professional Practice for Counselling with Relationships Scotland.

Background

Relationships Scotland (previously Relate Scotland / Couple Counselling Scotland) has a long history of delivering relationship counselling throughout Scotland. The organisation supports a network of local services that deliver relationship counselling and a wide range of other family support services across the country. The organisation provides support to around 20,000 people each year.

Aims

The aim of the workshop is to provide the participants with an understanding of the social, political and organisational context within which the discipline of relationship counselling takes place within the voluntary sector in Scotland today.

Participants will understand the role that relationship counselling plays in supporting the Scottish Government's vision, with particular reference to health, mental well-being, children and families and other associated areas such as housing and education.

Strong reference will be made to research which will give participants an overview of the evidence for the efficacy of relationship counselling. This will include studies from the Tavistock Institute, the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, Relate and others.

Participants will also understand the practical and procedural challenges of operating a voluntary sector agency, covering issues such as funding, client donations and charging, the setting of standards and policies and the governance of a nation-wide network of local services.

Reference will also be made to how agencies such as Relationships Scotland are making use of the new technologies and social media.

Method

This relatively short workshop will utilise a mixture of presentations by the facilitators and discussion and questions involving the participants.

PowerPoint will be used and promotional material on Relationships Scotland will be available.

Conclusions / Implications

The workshop will encourage participants to consider implications for their own practice that might arise from the workshop.

Title: Spirituality and Counselling: exploring the need for a teaching module that overtly focuses on spirituality as part of counsellor training

Presenter: Dr Innes Visagie

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Presentation Format: Paper

The paper will explore the following aspects:

1. Is there a need for a more definite focus on spirituality as part of counsellor training?
 - a. The paper will refer to and analysing a research project to that effect that was done amongst counsellors in Germany and published in 2011.
 - b. A possible reference to a more local research project to this effect.
2. Is the current surging interest in spirituality in general something new and what is its impact on counselling and psychotherapy?
3. If there is to be such a more overt focus on spirituality in the training of counsellors, what should be the content of such a teaching unit/module?

The theory behind this paper/research project is that the current surging interest in spirituality is impacting counselling & psychotherapy. The theory assumes that the impact is in the sense that counselees are more open to referring to their own spirituality and more willing to seek, in the spiritual sphere, for help to cope with the challenges in life. The theory also suspects that counsellors are more open to the reality of a spiritual dimension or entity and that some counsellors are more in touch with their own spirituality, but that they feel ill-prepared to deal overtly with spiritual issues or even with the spiritual dimensions that are, holistically speaking, part of every aspect of our human existence.

The theory will be tested against the research project that was published in 2011, and against a possible more local research project. The theory will also be tested, in a more philosophical way, by analysing the new surge in interest in spirituality and how this is impacting counselling and psychotherapy. This will be by way of a short analysis of some relevant publications that deal with these aspects.

Assuming that the theory behind the project is true, I will look at what the content of such a teaching module would look like. I will explore to see if any such discussions are taking place currently, and if so, what elements form part of the content of such a module. Again, the study will be limited to literary research.