



COSCA 5th COUNSELLING
RESEARCH DIALOGUE

'MAKING RESEARCH ACCESSIBLE'

TUESDAY 25 NOVEMBER 2008

Counselling & Psychotherapy in Scotland

**BARCELO STIRLING HIGHLAND HOTEL
29 SPITTAL STREET, STIRLING FK8 1DU**



PORTFOLIO OF ABSTRACTS

Azizah Abdullah

**Professional Role:
institution/Affiliation:**

**PHD Student
University of Strathclyde**

ABSTRACT:

POSTER

Practitioners` experience of using creative approaches in person-centred therapy with young people: a qualitative investigation

Aims

This study is the first step in a PhD research programme to find out about creative practices used in person-centred therapy with young people aged between 10 and 16. The study investigates what types of creative practices are employed by person-centred therapists (e.g. drawing, art and crafts, play) with this client group and the kinds of young people for which the practices may be most suitable. The study also focuses on practitioners` experiences and perceptions of why such creative work might be helpful for young people.

Methodology

This study was conducted through in-depth interviews with experienced person-centred therapists across the UK.

Results/Implications

The kinds of creative practice that have been used are arts, play and expressive media. Some creative practices are integrated with others while others are utilised in isolation. The practitioners believe that these practices are particularly helpful as an alternative form of communication, as spontaneous expression, and to express inner feelings, facilitate self-disclosure, enhance the relationship, and allow clients the opportunity to act out and break the boundary.

It is hoped that the findings from this research will help person-centred therapists to develop and refine their use of creative techniques in this area. This presentation will also consider the implications of the findings for the development of creative work in person-centred therapy.

Keywords: person-centred therapist, creative practice, young people

Jane Balmforth

Professional Role:

Institution/Affiliation/Workplace:

**PhD in Counselling Student
University of Strathclyde**

ABSTRACT:

PAPER

'I never spoke about it before': an analysis of a client disclosure event in therapy.

Background

Disclosure is an essential element of therapy – a client accesses his or her thoughts and feelings and in turn discloses these, together with personal information, to the counsellor in order to move forward in the therapeutic process. However, disclosing to the counsellor may often present a client with a dilemma of what, how much and when to reveal, especially when the disclosure is painful.

Aims

Using data from an archive study I wanted to explore the process that one client went through before, during and after disclosing important and painful personal information to the therapist. I also wished to consider the connection between the disclosure and the outcome of the therapy.

Results

I used Comprehensive Process Analysis (developed by Professor Robert Elliott) to carry out a fine-grained study of a disclosure event, defined by the client as significant in a post-session questionnaire. The key speaking turns of the disclosure were micro-analysed and explicated to draw out the unspoken process of the client.

The study considered the effect of a significant client disclosure on the session where it occurred, as well as on subsequent sessions and on the counselling treatment as a whole. The transcript was examined to track where the disclosure was hinted at earlier in the session.

Conclusions/Implications

A disclosure which is defined as significant at the time by the client and appears therapeutically important to the counsellor may have a different significance when considered over the whole course of therapy. Much depends on what a client understands their task in therapy to be and the counsellor needs to be alert to this and to the many facets of client disclosure.

Rebecca Black

Professional Role:

Institution/Affiliation/Workplace:

Student

University of Strathclyde

ABSTRACT:

PAPER

Background

The Researcher is interested in what contributes to therapeutic change among Student clients who have used the Student Counselling Service at the University of Stirling.

Aims

This research project aims to evaluate how helpful or hindering the counselling service may be, using CORE-OM questionnaires as a quantitative measure of client change and using Elliott's [2002] Change Interview Schedule to assess the level of qualitative change among a small sample of Participating Students.

In undertaking this study, the Researcher aims to discover if any common aspects of counselling have contributed to psychological change in relation to outcomes among clients. It also aims to discover various aspects of the pre-counselling experience among the sample, including how they initially found out about the Student Counselling Service as well as positive and negative experiences.

Results

Quantitative results from CORE-OM questionnaires show that 12 Participating Students demonstrated high CORE-OM scores before therapy, which had reduced by the 3rd session and further reduced by the last counselling session. Almost all Participants demonstrated reduced CORE-OM scores which reflect non-clinical levels of psychological distress by the 6th session; this shows sufficient improvement to have changed Participating Students' scores to a level *more representative of the general population* than a clinical population.' (Jacobson et al., 1988)

Qualitative results from 6 participant interviews are at analysis stage, but so far results show that Participants have generally found counselling on campus to be very helpful. An analysis of what Participants found difficult but tolerable and suggestions they wish to feedback to the Counselling Team is part of the enquiry.

Implications from this service evaluation will hopefully inform a quality audit for good practice to improve the access and therapeutic quality of campus counselling at the University of Stirling.

**Dr Julie Brownlie
Mr Simon Anderson
Ms Susan Reid**

**Dr Julie Brownlie
Professional Role: Senior Lecturer
Institution/Affiliation/Workplace: University of Stirling**

**Mr Simon Anderson
Professional Role: Director
Institution/Affiliation/Workplace: Scottish Centre for Social Research**

**Ms Susan Reid
Professional Role: Researcher
Institution/Affiliation/Workplace: Scottish Centre for Social Research**

ABSTRACT: PAPER

The Someone to Talk to Study: using research to rethink the therapeutic turn

Background

The starting point for the Someone to Talk to Study is the argument that in recent years people in the UK, have become more open to discussing emotions both with each other and, crucially, with others who are trained to help (Furedi, 2004). While not always in agreement about how to define this therapeutic turn, few researchers have questioned that this professionalisation of our emotional lives has taken place. Yet despite academic theorising about these changes and the renewed emphasis on counselling within the policy domain, to date, there has been no systematic research focused on the UK population's beliefs or practices about seeking emotional support, nor any investigation of the respective roles of formal or informal sources of emotional support in people's lives. In other words, while we may now know something in research terms about those who choose to access formal support services, we know very little about the beliefs and practices of those who do not, or have not yet, used formal services.

Aims

This paper aims to engage with the theme of the conference, 'making research accessible' by doing exactly that – presenting emerging findings from this UK-wide, ESRC-funded study of emotional support as an illustration of how research findings can be brought to bear on the content and direction of policy and practice in relation to counselling.

Results

Drawing on data from a module of questions included in the 2007 British Social Attitudes Survey, we present some early findings particularly in relation to people's beliefs and practices about 'emotions talk' and the seeking of emotional support.

Implications

By connecting these findings to policies concerned with access to the ‘talking therapies’, we hope to illustrate why research – and, by extension, the accessibility of that research – does matter.

Professor Mick Cooper

Professional Role:

Professor in Counselling

Institution/Affiliation/Workplace:

**Counselling Unit, University of
Strathclyde**

ABSTRACT:

PAPER

Relational Depth: What the Research is Telling Us?

Background

Relational depth can be defined as ‘A state of profound contact and engagement between two people.’ The term was coined by Dave Mearns in the 1990s (though many other philosophers and psychologists have written of this in-depth connecting), and was developed in Mearns and Cooper’s *Working at Relational Depth in Counselling and Psychotherapy* (Sage, 2005), which included empirical research on therapists’ experiences of in-depth meetings.

Aims

In recent years, several researchers have undertaken in-depth studies of relational depth within therapy, and the aim of this presentation is to critically review these findings. In particular, the paper examines the questions:

- What is it like to meet another at a level of relational depth?
- Do clients experience relational depth as well as therapists?
- Are clients’ and therapists’ experiences of relational depth synchronous (i.e., Do they happen at the same time)?
- Is the experiencing of relational depth within the counselling or psychotherapeutic relationship related to therapeutic outcomes?

Results

- The principal findings of this review are that:
- Moments of relational depth do seem to be experienced in therapy
- Clients seem to experience these moments as well as therapists
- The experience of relational depth is generally a shared, rather than individual, phenomenon
- Experiencing relational depth seems associated with positive therapeutic outcomes

Conclusions/Implications

The research suggests that the facilitation of an in-depth encounter between therapist and client is a worthwhile focus for therapeutic work. However, there is a need for much more research.

Elliott, Robert
Freire, Beth

Professional Role:
Institution/Affiliation/Workplace:

Professor in Counselling
Counselling Unit, University of
Strathclyde

ABSTRACT:

PAPER

Empirical Support for Person-Centred/Experiential Psychotherapies: Meta-analysis Update 2008

Background

Understanding and contributing to the evidence base that supports their practice is a key survival strategy for Person-Centred/Experiential therapists and counsellors.

Aims

Building on previous meta-analytic studies (e.g., Elliott, Greenberg & Lietaer, 2004), we added another 80 predominantly recent outcome studies to the large sample previously reported, in order to provide an analysis of more than 200 quantitative outcome studies on person-centred, nondirective-supportive, process-experiential/emotion-focused, and other experiential therapies.

Results

Consistent with previous versions of this meta-analysis, we found the following: (1) Clients in PCE therapies experience large amounts of pre-post change. (2) Posttherapy gains were maintained over early and late follow-ups. (3) In controlled studies, clients experienced large gains relative to untreated groups. (4) In general, PCE therapies appeared to be statistically and clinically equivalent when compared to non-PCE therapies. (5) In focused comparisons examining four different types of PCE therapy, CBT was clearly superior to nondirective-supportive therapies, but equivalent to bona fide person-centred therapy; emotion-focused therapy appeared to be superior to CBT; while other experiential therapies were equivalent to CBT in effectiveness. These results held regardless of whether analyses made use of all available studies or were restricted to RCT studies only.

Implications

These results are consistent with complementary lines of evidence relating empathy to outcome (Bohart et al., 2002), and client treatment preference data. Taken together, the body of evidence clearly indicates that PCE therapies should be offered to clients in primary care, NHS, and other mental health settings. Relying on multiple lines of evidence, such as provided in the present study, provides a sound basis for establishing public mental health policy.

Anne Goldie

Professional Role:

**Student, University of Edinburgh
Manager, Tom Allan Centre**

ABSTRACT:

POSTER

**A Process of Becoming....” from Passion and Curiosity to Research Proposal
A Qualitative Study of Tutor Self-Experience in the Training of Counsellors and
Doctors.**

In this research project I will explore the feelings and attitudes of trainers, including myself, in groups of learners where the components of Transformative Learning, as defined by Mezirow, have been identified.

I am particularly interested in the way that tutors experience themselves in the time immediately prior to a group, during a group, and in the immediate aftermath of a group. I am also interested in any similarities and differences between professions.

The study will have three strands: an exploration of Self as tutor; the self-experience of medical tutors and the self-experience of counselling tutors. My methodology will be heuristic, and I will use one to one interactions to generate data.

Tina Livingstone

**Professional Role:
Institution/Affiliation/Workplace:**

**MSc Student
University of Strathclyde**

ABSTRACT:

PAPER

Investigating Trans-Identified and Trans-Historied Clients' Experiences of Appropriate and Inappropriate Therapists' Practices in Counselling and Psychotherapy

Background

Previous research with this population has focussed on medical services (Ross M.W. and Need J.A. 1989; Pfafflin F and Junge A 1992; Bockting et al 2004) Indeed the BACP's "systematic review of research on counselling and psychotherapy for lesbian, gay, bisexual & transgender people" (King et al, 2007) "found very few papers focusing on psychotherapy for transgender people that were not solely concerned with preparing them for gender reassignment or assisting them afterwards to adapt to their new gender role". This study then concerns the trans' populations' experience of counselling received for everyday human issues, rather than clinical treatment.

Aims

To study trans-identified and trans-historied clients' experiences of appropriate and inappropriate therapists' practices toward them in counselling and psychotherapy and compare this with that of same sex orientated clients (Liddle 1996)
The ultimate aim being to help close the gap identified by King et al (2007) through informing both future good practice and further research via client perspective.

Methodology

Quantitative research via anonymous online questionnaire modelled on that of Liddle (1996) to enable comparison.

Results

Preliminary analysis already shows relative risk ratios between inappropriate practices and therapy being experienced as destructive/ not at all helpful parallel to Liddle, with some strong results. For example blaming clients' problems on their trans-identity or sexual orientation, or insisting on making this the focus without evidence of relevance increased the likelihood of therapy being regarded unhelpful (Livingstone 4.39 / Liddle 3.41)
Responses are currently being examined for any positive or negative trends with regard to gender and trans status, both of client and of counsellor.

Conclusions/Implications

The trends parallel King et al's findings that the helpfulness of psychotherapy within the LGB sector is associated with the client's perception of their therapist's attitude, with negative attitudes predicting lower satisfaction.

Comparatively higher scores within the trans' population may suggest increased hyper-vigilance in certain aspects.

Marilyn McGowan

Professional Role:

Institution/Affiliation/Workplace:

Student, University of Edinburgh

ABSTRACT:

PAPER

How does working with young people affect the way counselling practitioners engage in supervision?

Background

Recent years have seen a steady rise and expansion of roles in practitioners offering counselling, advice and guidance to vulnerable young people. The focus on such work has been given added impetus by numerous national and international reports highlighting issues around the well being of young people.

However, there has been little research into the support needs of those offering support to vulnerable young people although some reports (Employers Organisation for Local Government, 2005) and practitioners (Edwards, 2001) have raised the issue of workforce retention and the need for adequate support mechanisms. Even less research has been conducted about the supervision of counsellors working with young people. The role of counselling supervision in supporting those who work with one of the most demanding client groups therefore remains largely unexplored.

Traditionally youth counselling has not followed the same route, or indeed had the same roots, as adult counselling and there is still little recognition of the different approaches and trainings needed to work with young people. Could this also be true of supervision?

Aims

To consider the supervision needs of counsellors working with vulnerable young people

To consider similarities and differences in supervision for youth counsellors with that of other counsellors

To consider the difficulties for a practitioner/researcher in this area

Results (Preliminary Findings)

Key themes have emerged in relation to the support needs of youth counsellors
Parallel processing issues exist across clients, counsellors and supervisors
Practitioner /researcher: Proposed model for youth counselling supervision

Conclusions

This paper is presented as preliminary findings from the initial stage of PHD study.
Participants will be invited to consider how knowledge can best be developed and
transferred for the benefit of counsellors and the young clients they support.

John McLeod

Professional Role:

Professor of Counselling

Institution/Affiliation/Workplace:

University of Abertay Dundee

ABSTRACT:

WORKSHOP

Developing research skills and awareness in participants on Diploma in Counselling programmes: the RDI initiative

A requirement for counselling practice to be research-informed is reflected in the expectation, embodied in various COSCA guidelines, that counselling courses should provide students or trainees with an appropriate grounding in research skills and awareness. However, designing and delivering research inputs that engage the imagination and energies of students can represent a significant challenge for course tutors. The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), through its Researcher Development Initiative (RDI) programme, in collaboration with the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), is supporting a series of training events on teaching research methods on counselling courses, and the publication of a training manual. The purpose of this workshop is to introduce participants to this 'training the trainers' RDI initiative. Workshop participants will have opportunities to:

- reflect on the role of research inputs within counselling and psychotherapy programmes with which they are involved;
- learn about an experiential approach to research training;
- try out some exercises and activities;
- learn about the events and resources being developed by the RDI group.

The workshop will be of interest to those who are involved in teaching counselling and psychotherapy at all levels, or in extending their own understanding of research. The workshop is facilitated by John McLeod, Professor of Counselling at University of Abertay Dundee, and author of *Doing Counselling Research* (2nd edn, Sage, 2003) and *Qualitative Research in Counselling and Psychotherapy* (Sage, 2001).

John McLeod

**Professional Role:
Institution/Affiliation/Workplace:**

**Professor of Counselling
University of Abertay Dundee**

ABSTRACT:

PAPER

Systematic case studies as a source of knowledge for practice: the development of a research network

Background

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in the role of case studies as a means of producing research evidence in counselling/psychotherapy that is relevant for practice. A significant landmark in this movement has been the publication of an on-line journal, *Pragmatic Case Studies in Psychotherapy*, dedicated to the dissemination of practice-based cases.

Aims

The aims of this paper are to introduce some principles of systematic case study inquiry, and to describe ways in which therapy practitioners can use their own clinical work to generate publishable case material.

Results

The paper provides an account of the seminars, workshops and practitioner research network being established to support this area of activity.

Implications

Robust and practicable methods exist to enable practitioners to engage in systematic case study research.

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in the role of case studies as a means of producing research evidence in counselling/psychotherapy that is relevant for practice. A significant landmark in this movement has been the publication of an on-line journal, *Pragmatic Case Studies in Psychotherapy*, dedicated to the dissemination of practice-based cases. The aims of this paper are to introduce some principles of systematic case study inquiry, and to describe ways in which therapy practitioners can use their own clinical work to generate publishable case material. The paper will also give an account of the seminars, workshops and practitioner research network being established to support this area of activity.

Presenter: John McLeod, Professor of Counselling at University of Abertay Dundee, and author of *Doing Counselling Research* (2nd edn, Sage, 2003) and *Qualitative Research in Counselling and Psychotherapy* (Sage, 2001).

**Kaye Richards
Mick Cooper**

Professional Role:

Institution/Affiliation/Workplace:

**Counselling in Schools Research
Consortium (CSRC)**

Other authors: Nancy Rowland, Karen Cromatory and Sue Pattison
Counselling in Schools Research Consortium (CSRC)

ABSTRACT:

PAPER

Assessing the feasibility of a Randomised Control Trial of Counselling in Schools

Background

Mental health problems in children and young people are increasing (World Health Organisation, 2006) with one in ten children in the UK now experiencing a diagnosable mental disorder (Green et al, 2004). There is emerging evidence to suggest that the provision of school-based counselling services across the UK has a positive impact on the emotional well being of children (see Cooper 2004, 2006), but these findings have yet to be confirmed using the methodology of a randomised controlled trial (RCT).

Aims

The Counselling in Schools Research Consortium (CSRC) believes that such an evaluation is essential to demonstrate the efficacy of school counselling and to influence developments on national policy on the funding and commissioning of such services. The consortium is testing the feasibility of conducting an RCT of counselling in schools in England and Scotland in 2008/09. The pilot RCT will examine issues around randomisation, assessment, standardising interventions and measuring outcomes.

Results/Conclusions

This paper will report on the trial methodology and will discuss a range of practical and ethical dilemmas associated with implementing an RCT protocol in secondary schools. This will include an overview of the key procedures being used, for example screening procedures and outcome tools, and the associated considerations for including young people in an RCT.

Conclusions/Implications

By reporting on the development of trial methodology in a school setting this paper will highlight the many issues faced in the implementation of RCT methodology in counselling and psychotherapy research.

Mhairi Thurston (lead author)
John McLeod

Professional Role:

Institution/Affiliation/Workplace:

University of Abertay Dundee

ABSTRACT:

PAPER

An inquiry into the emotional impact of sight loss and the counselling experiences and needs of blind and partially sighted adults

Background

The link between the sight loss and depression is well documented (Black, 1999; Burmedi, Becker, Heyl, Wahl & Himmelsbach, 2002; Carabellese, Appollonio, Rozzini, Bianchetti et. al., 1993; Horowitz & Reinhardt, 2000; Upton, Bush & Taylor, 1998). The UK Vision Strategy, (RNIB, 2008), seeks to bring the emotional impact of sight loss into public awareness and improve access to emotional support for visually impaired people. However, dedicated counselling services for visually impaired people remain scarce (Nicholls, 2004).

Aims

The aim of this research was to collect quantitative and qualitative data from a sample of 18 blind and partially sighted adults (average age 64) which explored the emotional impact of sight loss in four core areas – (mood, self concept, social connectedness and loss) and to investigate the participants' counselling experiences and needs. From this it was hoped to inform policy and practice.

Results

Results found that participants with a serious eye condition shared a common transition from sight to blindness, starting with diagnosis, coping with deterioration of sight, experiencing loss in different areas of life, experiencing changed perceptions of self in relation to society, experiencing others in a changed way and experiencing rehabilitation. From this common narrative, a theoretical model describing the transition from sight to blindness is proposed. Participants also reported negative perceptions of counselling and a lack of counselling opportunities in relation to their sight loss, as well as a desire to have the opportunity of counselling during the time of diagnosis of a serious sight condition.

Implications

The findings have implications for clinicians, service providers and counsellors, particularly regarding the need for counselling after diagnosis of visual impairment and the specific challenges facing those who deliver counselling to blind and partially sighted clients.



Christopher Vlasto

Professional Role: Palliative Care Counsellor
Institution/Affiliation/Workplace: Fife Palliative Care

ABSTRACT: PAPER

A Comparison Between Groupwork and One to One Counselling as Agents of Change in the Bereavement Process – Therapists’ Views

Background

This is a small qualitative study of therapists’ perceptions of the relative benefits of facilitated support groups and individual counselling for the bereaved. It was undertaken for an MSc in Counselling at Strathclyde University. Nine bereavement therapists were interviewed. The analysis was conducted using “grounded theory” methodology

Aims

As a Palliative Care Counsellor, engaged in individual counselling and groupwork with bereaved clients, I had questions that had not been addressed in the literature about who benefits from each intervention and in what way?

Results

Groups were seen as having a “normalising” effect, helping clients socialise and engage with the world. Individual counselling was seen as safer, enabling assessment, identification of blocks, the expression of extreme or unacceptable emotion, and the building of trust.

Conclusions

Both interventions were perceived as beneficial, groups helping clients in the latter stages of grief, when distress is less intense, conveying hope and facilitating social contact thereby mitigating against the isolation of “social loneliness” (Weiss 1975).

Individual counselling was suggested as a primary intervention, safer for vulnerable clients, where the story can be told, assessment undertaken, issues worked with and trust rebuilt. It may be useful for clients suffering from “emotional loneliness” due to death of a security figure (Weiss 1975).

This study is limited however by it’s reliance on therapists’ rather than clients’ perceptions of the benefits and by the size and lack of homogeneity of the sample.

Future studies, quantitative and qualitative, into clients’ perceptions would build on the present work.



Susan Wiggins

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

ABSTRACT: PAPER

Prevalence, Moderators and Characteristics of Relational Depth Events in Counselling and Psychotherapy

Background

Relational depth has been described as 'A state of profound contact and engagement between two people, in which each person is fully real with the Other, and able to understand and value the Other's experiences at a high level' (Mearns and Cooper, 2005, p.xii). So far there are no quantitative studies which explore its' characteristics or whether gender or role of individual influence its prevalence during significant events in therapy.

Aims

To identify the extent to which relational depth was present during significant events in therapy, the characteristics of such events, and the factors which determine their prevalence.

The ultimate aim of this research is to create a questionnaire which measures clients' and/or counsellors' perceived levels of relational depth (as described by Mearns and Cooper, (2005).

Methodology

Quantitative analyses were used but in light of the conference theme, statistical terminology will be at a minimum in order that it is accessible to those familiar, and those not familiar, with statistics.

Results

For clients, 8.3% of important events were rated as having a clear presence of relational depth and 26% were rated as probably having such.

For therapists, 13.6% important events were rated as having a clear presence of relational depth and 24.5% were rated as probably having such.

Relational depth-present significant events were found to be especially characterised by feelings of connection, love, respect, being respected and intimacy.

There was no evidence that gender or role influence the prevalence of relational depth.

However, there was trend where relational depth seemed to occur more for females than males.

Conclusions/Implications

This research implies that relational depth may occur equally for clients and counsellors. It also suggests that to experience relational depth one may need to be open to experiences of connection, love, respect and intimacy.
