

The Theoretical Approach in Individual Counselling: a Case Study in Malaysia

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Abstract- School counsellor trainees are expected to go for internship during their study. Research has been carried out regarding counsellors, and also the effectiveness of the interventions. However, there is an increasing concern regarding the application of counselling theories among trainee counsellors. This is a case study investigating the common counselling theories used by the trainee school counsellors and factors that affect the application of the counselling theories. Ten presentations are selected randomly from five internship counselling trainees at one of the Malaysian training institutes. Results showed that most of the trainees used Choice Theory Reality Therapy, and most clients shared family problems during the individual counselling, thus factors for choosing certain theories are also identified. Implications and suggestion are given at the end of the paper.

Keywords- *counselling theories, trainees, school counsellors, techniques*

I. INTRODUCTION

A considerable amount of literature has been published on the effectiveness of an intervention [2, 8, 10, 13, 14]. However, counsellors are expected to help clients in any of the counselling sessions - whether individual or group. So, trainees are expected to be well equipped with the knowledge and skills in applying the techniques suggested by the theories in the counselling session. Moreover, the responsibility of a counsellor not to harm clients is emphasized by the Malaysian Counsellors Act (1998). Counsellors are expected to give beneficial treatments to them.

Recent studies have revealed that clients who have the experience of being helped by skilful counsellors have positive impact on their personal development [2, 3, 16]. However, without engaging well structured training to counsellors, students and schools may be adversely affected. It was reported that the fragility of family institution due to the busy schedule of working parents to sustain life also contributes to problematic adolescence in Malaysia [3, 15, 23]. School students who were having problems may look for help. Without family support, they have another choice – which is schools. However, if school counsellor trainees during internship are lacking of information and skills on how to guide

these adolescents, thus what will happen to the helping process? So, counsellor trainees should be skilful and knowledgeable on how to help them. In order to overcome this, counsellor trainees need to be trained on how to apply the counselling techniques as suggested by the counselling theories effectively.

As counsellor trainees spend about three to four years at the institutions, thus an ideal place to give them adequate training is during the period of their study at the institution. One of the final practical training for counsellors trainees is internship. [12] Indicates that during internship, trainees are given opportunity to gain experience through the supervision of a reliable supervisors. Supervisors are counsellor educators who are registered under a professional body certificated by the government. And through internship, trainees are given the chance to develop themselves on knowing and identifying the best method or theories to be used in the sessions [11]. Thus, counselling theoretical approaches and techniques is one of the aspects that should be focused in their training. Research also indicates that counselling theories, techniques and skills play an important role in helping students and teachers at school [2, 12, 20]. Majority of the Malaysian counsellors are found to be using Choice Theory Reality Therapy (CTRT) compared to other theories [1] as CTRT has been recognized as brief therapy that is effective for school settings. However, this finding contradicts with another research stating that the most theoretical approaches widely used by counsellors are Person-Centered [22]. These two studies focused more on counsellors at work settings. However an increasing interest is shown on counsellors trainees experience and skills during the training period involving practicum, and internship. So, this study investigates the common counselling theories used by the trainee school counsellors and factors that affect the application of the counselling theories in individual counselling. The remaining section of this paper will discuss on the methodology, results and discussion.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a case study design study to investigate the theoretical approaches used by school counsellor trainees in conducting individual counselling during internship. This

design has been used by other researchers [5]. This is due to case study is found to be useful in getting information related to particular issues.

Five participants were selected randomly in this case study. Each participant presented their case studies regarding their counselling sessions that were carried out during their internship. Reports on the case studies are collected. A well-known teacher training institution in northern part of Malaysia was randomly chosen in this study. The institution was chosen because it is one of the institutions that has been enrolling and graduating most of the school counsellors in Malaysia.

Prior to the beginning of the study, a month was spent to get the permission from the authorities to carry out this study. The counsellor trainees were given 16 weeks to undergo their internship. During this period, counsellor trainees are required to conduct individual counselling sessions with the school students. The individual counselling sessions may take about 40 minutes to one hour for each session. The frequency of the sessions for each client depends on the need of the clients. Counsellor trainees are required to present two case studies, while the counsellor educators are required to guide them. At the end of the presentation, counsellors trainees are asked to do reflection.

III. RESULTS FINDINGS

The findings results are discussed in two parts. First, the demographic data for the school counsellor trainees. Secondly, information pertaining to the clients and lastly on the theories used by the counsellor trainees.

A. Counsellor Trainees

Ten presentations were chosen randomly. As each trainees are required to present two case studies, only five (5) counsellors trainees involved in this study. Results indicate that there are 3 female counsellors trainees and 2 male counsellors. These findings also have been reported by a study that stated that majority of the counselling practitioners in Malaysia are women as they are more interested in venturing into helping profession than men [22].

All of the counsellors trainees are single Malay trainees of the age of 23 to 25 years old. The location for the internship practice is at Perak, Malaysia. Most of them are located at rural areas, where most of the students are of low status socioeconomic group.

B. Clients

Most clients in the case studies presented are female school students and a small number is male clients. Other studies also found that female students frequently seek for help compared to male students [4, 6, 18, 19]. Most of the female clients are more expressive and seek for help. On the other hand, the male students are more reluctant to meet counsellors.

Most of them (80%) are in Form Three and Four or of the age of 15 and 16 years old, while others are in Form 1 or thirteen years old and in Form 2 or fourteen years old (20%). This finding also has been reported by other studies that the

most frequent clients that come and see school counsellors are adolescents of the age of 14 to 16 years old [2, 10, 14]. [7] Stated that adolescents have difficulty in identifying their identity during this stage.

Most of the clients (60%) stay with their parents, while the rest stay at the orphanage (10%), and single parents (30%). All of them are seeking help regarding family problems. Family problems have been identified as one the problems faced by adolescents nowadays [15, 23]. Counsellor trainees should also be prepared to handle cases pertaining to family issues before going for internship.

C. Counselling theories

Most of the trainee counsellors (60%) reported that they chose Choice Theory Reality Therapy in the counselling sessions, while the others (40%) used Rationale Emotive Behaviour Therapy. This finding also supported earlier research that identified the most favorable theory in Malaysia is CTRT [1], however contradicts with another research that reported the most theoretical approaches widely used by counsellors in Malaysia is Person-Centered [22]. This indicates that most of the trainee counsellors in this study used CTRT compared to other theories.

D. Factors for choosing the theories

Most counsellor trainees informed that factors for choosing certain theories due to diagnose of the problems expressed by the clients, resources regarding the theory and also training especially during workshops and practicum. Counsellors trainees also mentioned about the laboratory work and practicum that has helped them with the choice and techniques of counselling. Thus, the resources for CTRT can be found in their native language as one of the lecturers has published a book giving guidelines to students of how to apply the theories and techniques in counselling sessions. This finding was also reported previous research that the factors for choosing the theoretical approaches depends on the trainees' personality, the laboratory experience, and demonstration and guidance by the counsellor educators [21]. This indicates that among factors that influence the choice of the counselling theories depends on whatever been given to the trainees and the resources available.

E. Reflection

Reflections were collected from counsellor trainees shows that the emerging themes includes the knowledge of theoretical approaches in counselling, and issues during the counselling sessions.

The knowledge regarding theoretically approaches in counselling has been mentioned as:

"I know about the theories and I feel this is the best for my client".

"Yes, I know the counselling theories".

"Counselling theories- yes CTRT, REBT, PCC, CBT..."

"I just wait for my clients and apply any theories that I am confident at.. I know best"

"Not sure whether this is right.. use theory... and techniques"

The justification for the choice has been informed. Some comments given are:

“I just choose this theory as I feel the problems are based on the way of thinking. That’s why I choose this”

“I just wait for my clients and search for the irrational beliefs to be said...”

“I think my client has conflict on the quality world and real world... everything depends on the choice they made...”

“I can see that my client are having problems with her family.. She needs love.. That’s why I chose this theory that will focus more on thinking”

This findings show that there are trainees who have adequate information and skills regarding theoretical approach for their sessions. However, still there are few who have difficulty in conducting the counselling sessions using theoretical approach. The expressions given are as below:

“I am confident as I prefer to use CTRT. I always practise using it before this, in lab and during practicum”.

“I know that the problem is based on the client’s irrational beliefs- that are why I chose REBT”.

“Sometimes I have doubt- sometimes okay”.

“I refer to the book written by our lecturer. Easier as it is in our native language”.

This finding indicates the problem they faced when conducting the counselling sessions. The findings regarding trainees difficulty in theories was also mentioned in the previous study that stated the knowledge of counselling theories is low and not sufficient to meet the growing complexity of client issues [21].

IV. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This paper has highlighted the information regarding the application of counselling theories among counsellors trainees in one of the training institutes in Malaysia. Trainee counsellors in this study have informed the counselling theories used by them during their internship. Choice Theory Reality Therapy was found to be the most favorable theories applied by the trainee counsellors for their clients. The reason for it may due to the fact it is brief, structured and has been found effective for school setting. Furthermore, it might be affected by the theoretical background of the counsellors educators who are mainly CTRT practitioners, as well as the resources and training they underwent. However, the problems faced by some of the trainee counsellors are understand the theories, applying them in the counselling sessions and using the appropriate techniques. This indicates that training counsellors would involve their understanding regarding theories, ways of applying techniques and also creativity in applying them to the clients. It is suggested that more laboratory work and workshops are given to enhance trainees the information and skills in choosing and applying theoretical approaches for clients. Other major counselling courses could also involve assignments related to laboratory work and applying skills in

the activities and programmes. Counselling educators should also take the initiative to write books in their native language as to help students and practitioners in using the theories in the counselling settings. Most of the clients are adolescents who are having family problems. This finding also indicates that trainees should be well trained based on current issues faced by their future clients.

This study, however involved a small number of participants. Thus, generalization is impossible for such study. It is hoped that the future research can be done with a large number of respondents investigating the application of counselling theories in depth. Structural equation modeling may be utilized to seek for the significant factors in using theoretical approaches effectively among counsellors trainees in Malaysia. Naturalistic inquiry method should also be carried out as it will also help to understand better the process of learning concerning the application of counselling theories among school trainees counsellors in Malaysia.

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