

Research has shown (Sussman, 1992) that many individuals often pursue a career in counselling because they need therapeutic help themselves. A thematic analysis of a focus group discussion of this phenomenon.



Rea Powell (P146483)

Dr. B Cole

M6X00966

Contents

- Abstract
- Literature
- Methodology
- Questions
- Themes
- Limitations
- Analysis
- Conclusion
- References



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Abstract

- Key Words: Counselling, Psychotherapy, Motives, The Subconscious, Career, Unconscious.
- This research aimed to critically assess the motivations of counselling skills students for wanting a career in counselling and psychotherapy through the use of a focus group discussion.
- The research was carried out in the form of a 3 question focus group discussion which was sent to participants in the form of a participant information and consent sheet prior to taking part in the study, 4 participants took part in the focus group.
- A thematic analysis of the subconscious motives of wanting a career in counselling was conducted. It was made clear that traumatic life experiences along with wanting to help others were two of the primary themes in wanting a career within the field.



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Abstract

- Participants were asked questions regarding significant life events and experiences of counselling to interpret if these had an impact on the participant's choice of profession.
- For those who had experiences of counselling from the eyes of the client and had come out the other side, whether positive or negative, all participants reported it as being a factor in their career choice.
- 100% of participants expressed that experiencing at least one significant challenging life experience had influenced their choice of programme. Such experiences included bullying, childhood difficulties, mental health issues, bereavement and post-natal depression.



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Literature

- In study by Bager-Charlson (2010) of 238 participants, 75% referred to personal experiences surrounding psychological distress as a primary influencing factor in wanting to study counselling and psychotherapy. Confirming the influence that personal experience has on ones' motives to train as a counsellor.
- A study amongst Rape Crisis Centre volunteers by Rath (2008) whose role included one to one counselling and strongly supports the phenomenon of a therapist or trainee having subconscious motives.
- A minority of participants disclosed that they were survivors of sexual abuse, and therefore acknowledged their survivor status as enhancing their level of competence as a counsellor. Stating that it increased their level of understanding (Rath, 2008). This researched aimed to explore this phenomenon in further detail.



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Methodology

The study followed a qualitative approach of thematic analysis to undertake its evaluation, thematic analysis is built upon the theoretical positions of Braun and Clarke (2006).

A rigorous thematic approach was required to conduct this study, therefore using thematic analysis, of which demonstrates an insightful analysis into whether trainee counsellors pursue a career in counselling because they need therapeutic help themselves (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Personal experiences were evaluated through the use of a thorough set of open ended questions, leading to data that could accurately identify important themes.

Data was collected through the use of a focus group discussion, of which was made up of four students undertaking a module in Empirical Research Skills. These students freely elected to take part in this focus group, having read a detailed information sheet and signing necessary consent forms before taking part in the research.



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Over-arching Question

- Do individuals pursue a career in counselling because they need therapeutic help themselves? An analysis of subconscious motives.



Prifysgol Cymru

Y Drindod Dewi Sant

University of Wales

Trinity Saint David

Subsidiary Questions

- What were your motives for studying counselling skills?



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Subsidiary Questions

- What subconscious motives could surround a therapist's choice of profession?



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Subsidiary Questions

- How do you think a client would be affected by a therapist not seeking their own personal therapy?



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Theme 1

- Wanting to help others - a need within the self for compassionate intervention.



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

D: "I'm quite keen on working with people, to be able to help people, offering support not necessarily always through the way of counselling but the skills and stuff learnt."

R: "I think for me, it was like.. coz I wanted to make people feel better ."

L: "I want to deal with a group of people, to give them a voice, to get out there and fight their corner for them."

Wanting to help others - a need within the self for compassionate intervention.

K: "To be able to help someone going through similar to what my friend went through or something else, that was my main motive I would say."

D: "This really caught my eye because I'm quite keen on working with people ."

D: "My main reason I think just so I could offer a helping relationship to people no matter what setting, but to be able to support people in their illnesses or even just in their day to day life, where they need someone to talk to."

Theme 2

- The Hidden Agenda - Impacts of trauma and personal experience on therapists choice of career.



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

L: "it was needing to understand why my brain worked like it did, you know why I'd completely changed to what I was before, so with me it was more of an understanding, but what I found going through it, is its give me strength again."

L: "so mine was more about discovering who I was."

L: "I had the worst years of my life in the last 5 years, well... 2 years into this one."

The impact of
trauma and
personal experience
on therapists choice
of career.

D: "I think it's helped me as a person ."

K: "I thought to myself then, after I kind of, you know, I did all these different things and nothing was really working for me, and then it kind of just switched and I thought no I wanna do something like this to help people because she never really got the help that she needed, and she never really felt comfortable with like, talking to someone."

R: "I'd been through a bit where I'd felt really low and I'd been counselling myself and I wasn't exactly pleased with it, and I found other ways of cheering myself up and getting on with stuff, but I hated the fact that I could see others who were low and I was like no, I need to help. "

Theme 3

- Countertransference - The impact of vicarious trauma within the helping professions.



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

D: "You pick up other people's issues and they kind of slot into your brain as well don't they?"

Countertransference
- The impact of vicarious trauma within the helping professions.

D: "something as simple as watching something on the TV and it sets you off crying, if you've got that person that's coming to you and is saying that you know I've lost my mum for instance, that might not be something that's happened to you but if that causes you to be upset."

L: "But that's why they want you to deal with it isn't it, dealing with your own issues before you're in best fit state to treat somebody else, or to be with somebody else or empathise with them, it's just selfish doing it that way around. ."

D: "You don't always disclose everything, or it might not be that you don't disclose everything, but that you don't realise that you've got an issue, you know say it was something where I don't know, you've been stabbed or something, you just..hang on, that's not a very good example, but you know what I mean, ok you've cut your finger on a piece of paper ok, you've cut your finger, you've got your finger, you've got a plaster on it, whatever. You've got someone coming to see to you, they've cut they're finger and that's really traumatised them, because that reminds them of when they cut themselves when they were younger, and if you haven't dealt with that issue which wasn't an issue at the time, then it makes you over think ."

Analysis

- The results of this focus group analysis concurred that all 4 participants disclosed that personal experiences motivated them to study counselling skills.
- In addition to this, 100% of participants also disclosed that their motivations for counselling skills originated from “wanting to help others”.
- Participants also declared that supervision and personal therapy were key components to avoiding experiences of vicarious trauma.
- Sussman (2007) claims that “an important determinant of the desire to practice psychotherapy involves the attempt to come to terms with one’s own psychological conflicts.” This was mirrored in participant statements.



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Focus Groups

What were the notable limitations?



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Limitations

- This study was conducted amongst all female participants.
- All of the participants were students studying a counselling skills programme.
- While participants had caring and helping experience, none of the participants were currently in counselling practice.
- No empirical evidence for what might constitute the ideal motivation for wanting a career in counselling and psychotherapy – concluding that there is no right or wrong answer.



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Conclusion

Do individuals pursue a career in counselling because they need therapeutic help themselves?

- It seems apparent from this research that an individual may be motivated to choose a career in counselling because of a variety of complex reasons.
- While all participants stated that their primary motive was “wanting to help others”, Duncan & Miller (2008) state that motivations to ‘help others’ can be linked to successful client outcomes.
- 100% of participants also disclosed that it was life experience that motivated them to study counselling skills, thus, understanding the reasons for an individual wanting to enter the profession is an important consideration when reflecting on pursuing a career within the field.



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Conclusion

Do individuals pursue a career in counselling because they need therapeutic help themselves?

- There seems to be no "ideal" motivation for entry into any field, thus no right or wrong answer, while it seems fair to state that motivations can often be naive and misinformed. This is down to the lack of understanding amongst the public surrounding what a career in counselling entails.
- To conclude, while no motivation to enter the field seems to be more superior than another, it seems that many practitioners do enter the field needing therapeutic help, yet do not discover this until much later in their career. 100% of participants disclosed that they believed personal therapy was a great advantage.



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Any Questions?



Prifysgol Cymru

Y Drindod Dewi Sant

University of Wales

Trinity Saint David

References

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). *Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp.77-101.

Beatty, E. (2012). *A Study of Motivations amongst Contemporary Trainee Counsellors for Pursuing a Career in Psychotherapy*. [online] Available at: https://esource.dbs.ie/bitstream/handle/10788/830/ba_beatty_e_2012.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y [Accessed 11 May 2018].

Cooper, M. (2008). *Essential research findings in counselling and psychotherapy: The facts are friendly*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Duncan, B. L. and Miller, S. D. (2008). 'When I'm good, I'm very good, but when I'm bad I'm better': a new mantra for psychotherapists. *Psychotherapy in Australia*, 15(1), 60–69.



References

Farber, B., Manevich, I., Metzger, J. and Saypol, E. (2005). *Choosing psychotherapy as a career: Why did we cross that road?* Journal of Clinical Psychology, 61(8), pp.1009-1031.

Norcross, J. and Farber, B. (2005). *Choosing psychotherapy as a career: Beyond “I want to help people”*. Journal of Clinical Psychology, 61(8), pp.939-943.

Rath, J. (2008). *Training to be a volunteer Rape Crisis counsellor: a qualitative study of women’s experiences*. British Journal of Guidance & Counselling. Volume 36. No. 1. 19-32.

Sussman M. B., (1995). *A Perilous Calling: The Hazards of Psychotherapy Practice*.

Sussman, M. (1992). *A Curious Calling: Unconscious Motivations for Practicing Psychotherapy*. 2nd ed. Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield.